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THE PREMIER SERIES

CATMUR'S CAVE

BY

RICHARD DOWLING

NATIONAL BOOK COMPANY

3, 4, 5 & 6 MISSION PLACE, NEW YORK

No. 6.

Richard
Dowling

Catmur's Cave

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RICHARD DOWLING

AUTHOR OF

"THE MYSTERY OF KILLARD," "THE WEIRD SISTERS," "AN ISLE OF SURREY," "A BAFFLING QUEST," ETC.

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CATMUR'S CAVE.

CHAPTER I.

CATMUR'S MAMMOTH CAVES.

"CATMUR'S Mammoth Caves of Art; of Giants and Dwarfs, and other Human Wonders; of Lions and Tigers, and other wild beasts; of African and Asian Magic!

"MAMMOTH ART! MAMMOTH BEAST! MAMMOTH MAN!

"MAGIC FROM THE NILE AND THE GANGES!

"CATMUR'S CAVES OF MAMMOTH MARVELS!

"THE GREATEST SHOW

"UNDER

"THE EARTH!!

"CATMUR'S SHOW!

"CLAYTON JUNCTION.

"ENTRANCE, SIX PENCE!!!

"TWO SHOWS A DAY: 2.30 AND 7.30!

'MARVELLOUS WORKS OF ART, ONE SHILLING EACH!!

"ENTRANCE, SIX PENCE!!!"

Clayton is the great railway junction at the south side of the Thames. It is situated in a densely-peopled neighbourhood. It owns a population greater than to-day crowns or surrounds all the hills of Rome.

The district is unoppressed by the magnificence of the West End, uncorroded by the squalor of the East. Now and then it produces crimes striking enough to set philosophy wagging his head. But its tragedies lack the sheer ferocity which makes passwords to fame.

It is heavy, dull, sodden, uninteresting. No agitation has ever been set going to raise its moral head. It has no tone, no voice even. In the concrete it is unknown. Hundreds of thousands of people live around Clayton Junction more hidden from society than the aboriginal pigmies of Africa. No judge of the High Courts of Law or peer of Parliament has ever seen it from its own pavements. It has neither hangman nor poet. It is an urban land of Hodge. It has no hope of promotion, no dream of ambition. No thought of the future beyond to-morrow.

In the main it is well-fed, comfortable, solvent. Its virtues are humble and kindly. Its vices commonplace, uninteresting, shocking. Its normal attitude is placid.

Nothing soul-stirring ever occurs within its bounds.

As far as it is concerned, culture, whether of the mind or of the fields, is not even the echo of a rumour, and questions that trouble the spirits of men in universities, nay, the universities themselves, are no more to it than the sped light of a dead sun.

It is easily amused.

More than a thousand trains pass through it every day. They come by high level, by low level, by ground level. No one man can tell how many sets of rails here converge and cross. The engineer of each company knows his own metals ; when changes are contemplated he makes himself acquainted with the metals of other companies. No man can tell how many trains may be seen from the high level at a given time. Day and night the turmoil of ponderous traffic shakes the hundred brick archways that hold the mighty viaducts aloft. Day and night the solid ground on which the arches rest trembles beneath the thunder of countless iron wheels.

At a point where two low level viaducts converge and where the outer row of archways forms one side of Railway Avenue, was the entrance to "Catmur's Mammoth Caves."

These Caves consisted of three chambers made of one of the deep archways in Railway Avenue—the space between the back of this archway and the

other converging line and of another archway under the viaduct at the back.

The "Cave" between the two arches was enclosed by upright planks and roofed with corrugated iron. At the back of the third chamber formed by the second archway lay a piece of desolate waste ground.

In the first of Catmur's Caves colossal plaster statues and casts of fragments of still more colossal figures were exhibited. Here plaster busts of the Royal Family were sold.

Along the sides of the middle Cave, the one of wood and iron, were ranged the cages of savage beasts. Here Geoffrey Monday, the lion-tamer, performed with lions and leopards, and entered the den of the ferocious tiger, Bengal, which had abroad killed and devoured one keeper, and which would let no human being near him but the swarthy, silent lion-tamer, Geoffrey Monday.

In the third Cave, formed by the second railway arch, monsters in human form were exhibited; the giant and the dwarf, the fat woman, the umbrella-haired man, the armless lady who with her feet knitted stockings for her feet, the legless man who lived in a bowl and strolled about on his hands, the human shadow, the spotted boy, with other freaks in human form. Here, twice daily, Mildred Starr, clair-

voyante, wrought in magic arts stolen from sorcerers on the banks of the sacred Ganges, and of the more sacred, the mysterious, the eternal Nile.

Bartholomew Catmur, whose wife was dead, and who had no child, owned all these wonders, and claimed for them that they, together with other attractions not enumerated, formed the greatest show under the earth.

Thousands came weekly to visit Catmur's show. All who saw it agreed that it was a marvellous six-pennyworth.

In the first hall, or Cave of Sculptures, the most extraordinary thing was that such large and excellent busts of the Royal Family could be sold at a shilling each.

In the second hall, or Cave of Beasts, the most extraordinary thing was the gentleness and love shown by the ferocious tiger, Bengal, towards the silent swarthy tamer, Geoffrey Monday.

In the third hall, or Cave of Magic and Monsters, the most extraordinary thing was the beauty of Mildred Starr, the young clairvoyante, niece of Bartholomew Catmur.

Twice a day Mildred Starr performed in the Cave of Magic and Monsters, and neither the audience nor the neighbours saw her more. She was Catmur's niece. It was rumoured she had a living mother,

afflicted in some awful manner which would make it better for the poor mother if she were dead. No neighbour in Railway Avenue could tell where Mildred Starr lived. Geoffrey Monday never spoke to a soul, and Bart Catmur would answer no question. All that could be told for certain was that Bart Catmur would allow no man to look with eyes of admiration upon his niece. Not a harmless pleasantry must pass between one of the audience and the sibyl. Bart Catmur had been known to declare that if he found any young fellow lurking about his show he would lock him up with Ben—the name by which the ferocious Indian tiger was popularly known.

Bart Catmur had the reputation of being rich. As there was mystery about Mildred Starr, so also was there mystery about Catmur's wealth. How he made money out of the show no one could tell. Taking into account capital invested, rent, food for beasts, and the hire of monsters, nothing would seem to be left for the owner out of the receipts at the door.

When people said admiringly to the showman: "It is wonderful, Mr. Catmur, how you can make it pay."

He would say: "It's the numbers that do it—the numbers," and he being a taciturn man who would

never speak when he wished to keep his mouth shut, nothing more could be got out of him.

Then people took into account several contradictory and conflicting and abnormal and unascertainable items of expense, and found themselves in greater perplexity than ever. Anyone could find out the wages of an umbrella-haired man, at Westminster. A quotation for giants and dwarfs, to suit customers, could be got by telephone from Whitechapel. The legless man was an odd lot, and might be a drug in the market or rule at a fancy rate, according to the demand. A fat woman was expensive, but orders could always be executed at Putney, if time were given. A human shadow and a spotted boy could be made up cheap in the New Cut out of any damaged lot. The armless lady, even if she were not "general utility," doing a turn in her present line, could be obtained by anyone on the outlook for such an article. A lion-tamer was, no doubt, a costly item, and Jeff Monday was not an ordinary lion-tamer. No other man in his business would dare to enter Bengal's cage. Jeff's tricks with the other beasts were the every-day work of men of his trade. But no other living master of wild animals would have to face the savage and forbidding tiger Ben, which was more gentle and submissive than a lamb and more affectionate than a dog in the hands of Jeff.

The plaster busts sold freely and were an element of attraction to the Caves.

The performance of Jeff Monday with the tiger was a daily cause of wonder and dread, and drew more people than the privilege of purchasing the Royal images.

The beauty and necromancy of Mildred Starr drew more people than all else together.

Although her person or performance did not evoke applause as loud as followed Jeff Monday's safe exit from the tiger's den, they dwelt long in the mind, and were the considerations which drew people to renew their visit.

The fact that the busts came from abroad might enable Catmur to make a profit out of the shilling charged for each. A wide difference between the pay Jeff Monday got and his worth to the show would explain some of Catmur's wealth. Mildred Starr was his niece and might have only a small salary. But even with these three grants in, people could not figure out Bart Catmur's prosperity.

"On the boards," no one could be more genial than Catmur. In intercourse with his neighbours he was gruff, ungracious, taciturn. He had not been known to use violence, but people felt he was a dangerous man, and said he would be fittingly matched with Ben in the tiger's most savage mood.

Whatever may have been the truth about the plaster busts, it was fortunate for a vain and greedy man like Bart Catmur that two members of his troupe, the two principal members, made little or no inroad on his treasury.

"What do you want?" said Catmur to Jeff when engaging him after buying Bengal. "You've been with the tiger a year. I allow he would not be much use to me if you did not go with him. You may speak up. You may open your mouth fairly wide."

"I want food," said the dark, silent lion-tamer.

"You shall have four meals of ortolans a day, if you wish."

"Clothes."

"I'll buy the left-off coronation robes of a king for you."

"Tobacco."

"A pound a day if you can smoke it."

"Straw to sleep on near the tiger."

"You shall have a four-posted bedstead of state. What else?"

"And the tiger."

"Wh—ew! But he is mine. I have bought him. You can't have him. What money do you want?"

"I want no money. I have neither kith nor kin. I have nothing on earth but the tiger. If you let me

be with him I shall only need what I said. I only want to be with him always. We understand one another, the tiger and I. I have nothing else to care for, and he will have no one but me. We love one another. If you take him away from me I will kill myself. I have no people. I have not even a name. They call me Monday because I was found on a Monday. I love the tiger and he loves me. I love nothing else, and he would kill anyone else who went near him. Look at him! He would die for me now! Give me what I ask and leave me with him always. I need no more. Some day he will forget I love him, and turn on me and kill me. I do not care. What good will money be to me then? When he turns on me it will be time for me to die. Do you agree?"

"Ay," said Bart, somewhat awed by the swarthy man, whose eyes now burned and blazed like glowing coals when he talked of separation from the beast, now grew large and soft and liquid when he spoke of his love for the beast. Bart Catmur kept his agreement with Jeff Monday and never interfered with man or beast.

Catmur was greedy and grasping and wanted everything; his lion-tamer wanted nothing but food to eat, straw to lie on, tobacco to smoke, and the company of a beast that would be valueless without

him, and with him would help to make a fortune.

When, after the first success of Mildred Starr in her performance, Bart Catmur discussed terms with her, she said, "Money! What do I want of money, uncle? How could *I* take money from *you?* Have you not done everything for my mother since her awful accident? All my life is yours, and all my love and life are hers. I can never repay you. I have everything I want when I have my mother—everything I care for in the world when I have her. All else I have is yours—yours—yours—a thousand times, my good, kind, generous uncle Bart."

Bart Catmur was lucky when arranging with the lovely clairvoyante of his show, the exquisite, dark-eyed, dreamy young girl whose mysterious beauty haunted visitors like a revelation in a dream, and drew them back again and again to lose their wonder of her in trance-like musings over the sweet, dark magic of her beauty.

"I have the busts," Catmur thought, "and the Royal Family are profitable patrons. I have the tiger, and the tiger is Jeff, and Jeff is cheaper to keep than the tiger. I have my idiot sister Ellen Starr, and the girl will stay with me for love of her until—— The girl is a good income now. She will one day soon, *when I am ready*, be a gold mine."

CHAPTER II.

CATMUR PREPARES FOR A VISITOR.

NOTWITHSTANDING his wealth and the advantageous terms on which he had engaged the two principal members of his company, and the profit derived from the Royal busts, and the unfailing patronage of the public, the owner of the Mammoth Caves had not a quiet mind. If things only went on as they were now going he should, even out of the show alone, make a respectable fortune. The takings at the door were satisfactory, and whatever the neighbours might think, Catmur's profit out of the busts was substantial. True, no one else could sell such busts at the price he took for them. There was a mystery about them, but mystery is an excellent article in the stock-in-trade of a showman.

Money was the god of Catmur's idolatry. He worshipped no other, and he would do anything for his god. He wanted everything he saw. He had a greedy mouth, a predatory eye. He wanted everything, but money most of all. How fortunate for him that Mildred Starr wanted only to be with

her afflicted mother, and that Jeff Monday wanted only food and clothing, tobacco to smoke, straw to sleep on, and the right to be with the only creature that understood and loved him, Ben, the savage tiger.

To Catmur's mind all this was good for the present. Any person menacing the existing condition he would treat as a foe. Anyone who deliberately threatened it he would regard as a venomous enemy. It had not until lately occurred to him to consider how he should feel or act towards a person who dared to interfere with the great stroke for future fortune which he had in his mind, and to which he might be able to give efficiency in a short time, for, rich as Catmur was, his present wealth he considered only as an earnest of what he hoped to obtain.

Catmur did not wear his heart upon his sleeve or give his confidence to any man. There were secrets in his life which if disclosed would ruin him in the present, and render grotesquely impossible all hope of realising his scheme of ambition in the future.

He looked on his trade in the busts with grave anxiety. He regarded the seclusion of Millie as absolutely essential to his great game. If Ben did turn on Jeff some day and kill the lion-tamer, why, it would be no more than the fortune of war. But if anything went wrong with the busts, or if Millie

should be drawn out of her seclusion, he would consider himself the victim of malignant fate, if he could not trace the disaster to malignant man; if the disaster befel and he could trace its origin to malignant man, well, it would be bad for that malignant man.

And now Bart Catmur was troubled in his mind. He suspected danger in the air.

A little while before Christmas he became aware that a tall, handsome young man, whose beard and moustaches were raven black, and whose forehead was very white, and whose eyes were very dark and close together, sharp and bright, and who always wore very white collar and cuffs and a blue necktie, visited the Caves three or four times, then ceased to appear for a time, and after Christmas turned up once more and for a few weeks came every other day.

During the year that Millie had been before the public scores of young men, and many men who could no longer be called young, had testified in one way or another to the extraordinary beauty of the girl. With these every-day admirers he had no serious difficulty. He gave them plainly and emphatically to understand the sibyl did not come down from the daïs either literally or figuratively, and that no words beyond words necessary to the performance were to be addressed to her.

In the Cave of Sculptures and the Cave of Beasts Catmur posed as the humorous man of the world who could bandy pleasantries and give and take. In the Cave of Monsters and Magic he became collected and reserved. Once the clairvoyante stepped upon the daïs his face grew forbidding, and he became the stern and inflexible guardian of secret arts and the name and person of his niece.

But with this tall, young dark man of the white shirt-collar and cuffs and forehead, and the bright, sharp? dark eyes, matters were different. I twas plain that, unlike the others, this young man was not merely a fool, and from a letter which Bart Catmur received towards the end of January it was plain this young man knew something which Catmur would have given a good deal he did not know. What that something was Catmur could not determine.

At eleven o'clock in the forenoon of the last Wednesday in January Bart Catmur was in the Caves alone. He was expecting a visit from the frequenter so much in his thoughts of late.

On the previous Monday the young man had approached Catmur in the Cave of Sculptures during the performance, and said, "Mr. Catmur, permit me to offer you my card. I wish to speak to you on an important private matter. I shall write asking you to

favour me with an appointment. I give you my card so that you may recognise my name when you get my letter. Good-evening."

Before Catmur could say a word the other was gone. Catmur read on the card, "Mr. Hugh Luxmore." "It looks like the name of a professional," thought the showman, "and yet he isn't a professional—he's too deep for a pro. I don't like his looks. I don't like him. I don't like this. I don't like the whole thing."

Tuesday morning brought a note from Mr. Hugh Luxmore. It said that he had lately been on the Continent; that he had a plan whereby he was sure money could be made out of the importation of works of art, and that he was in possession of facts and ideas which would greatly interest Mr. Catmur. Would that gentleman grant him the favour of a private meeting?

Catmur answered, appointing to see Mr. Luxmore in the Caves on Wednesday at a quarter-past eleven. He was now awaiting that gentleman. Until one o'clock he did not expect any member of his company to arrive. One of the great conveniences of the Caves was the piece of waste ground at the back. This allowed a private approach to the door at the rear of the Cave of Monsters. At night no one slept in the place but Jeff Monday. He went every fore-

noon to Catmur's private house to do odd jobs and for a breath of air. He and Catmur carried the only keys of the outer doors.

Bartholomew Catmur was slightly under middle height, thick-set without stoutness, and strong and active for a man approaching sixty. His face was round and red and close-shaven. He had small grey eyes and a straight, hard, lipless mouth. His rough grizzled hair was cut close to a round bullet head, set on a short thick neck. The face was capable of an expression of rugged good humour, and that expression it usually wore to the public. Now as he walked up and down between the shuttered cages, all of which were on wheels and closed, the face was set, determined, savage.

As he plodded heavily up and down on the thick sawdust he thought:

"What this young gentleman knows will make more difference to *him* than to *me*. What he has to say he can say here."

He paused in his walk and looked around him at the closed cages with an evil smile.

"No one can ever hear us." Casting his eyes aloft: "The trains make plenty of noise to drown our voices if we come to words."

Suddenly he approached a cage in the middle of the left-hand row, drew out a pin and let the heavy

swing shutter fall with a long clang. From the floor of the cage a scarred, battered, huge, terrifying head was raised over a long, lean, lank, striped side, and turned with blinking eyes upon the light. With a yawn and a loud thump the head fell back upon the wooden flooring of the cage.

"And if we come to blows," muttered Catmur, "why, the open door of Ben's cage would account for anything that might happen, and," kicking the ground at his feet, "there's plenty of sawdust if anything does happen before Ben gets his chance of number two."

Catmur stood with eyes fixed on the ground lost in thought.

All at once he moved to a small square table in the middle of the floor, and took from the drawer the long, sharp knife used when cutting up food for the beasts. He flung the knife on the table, muttering, "It's too big to carry. 'Twill be as handy there."

At the sound of the opening drawer the tiger sprang up, and, recognising the knife, uttered a savage growl, followed by a roar that shook the roof with horrible reverberations. Then, with lowered head and frenzied eyes and lashing tail, the tiger moved up and down inside the bars, sawing the air with grating snarls, ravenous, mad for food.

"Not yet, Ben," said Catmur, wiping his forehead with the back of his hand—"not yet."

The tiger lashed his tail and ran up and down the cage, rolling back his lips from his hideous yellow fangs.

A bell tinkles in the outer Cave.

"Patience, Ben," said Catmur, closing up the shutter of the cage. "Patience, Ben. Here's Mr. Luxmore." And having swung up the huge shutter and secured the hasps, Catmur hastened to the front door and admitted the young man.

CHAPTER III.

TWO VERSIONS OF THE ACCIDENT.

The waste land at the back of the Caves owed the fact that it had been put to no use to four causes. No highway ran through it or near it; the ground-level railways cut it up into unprofitable lots; on one edge of it lay worked-out sandpits, and on another stood a gas-house. The outline of it was so torn and jagged and irregular as to defy definition, except that it was rudely triangular. Its surface was scarred, broken, seamed; with here and there a patch of scrubby grass, and here and there bald patches, and here and there mounds of engine-ashes, and here and there hillocks of gas-house refuse. Years ago the land had been used as a dairy farm, and in the middle of it the farm-house still stood, sole relic of its pastoral time.

In this house in the desert of man's making lived Bartholomew Catmur with his sister Ellen Starr and Millie, clairvoyante of Catmur's Caves. The

real name of Catmur's sister was Taylor, but for many years, long before the girl burst in her fresh young beauty on the audience at the Caves, the two had at Catmur's desire adopted the name now borne by both.

Mrs. Starr was a tall, slender, gentle-mannered woman of forty-five. Already her black hair was turning grey. Seventeen years before a terrible accident befel her, and from that day to this her mind to everything occurring before that accident was dim and uncertain—for all practical purposes a blank. She knew that her name had been Catmur, that she had been married and left a widow with a young child, that something appalling had happened to her, that in the accident which had befallen her she had been to blame, and that Millie was her child, now grown up into womanhood.

She was perfectly submissive and gentle, the gentlest creature on earth. She did as she was asked with a smile, and never complained or repined. She had no whims or oddities. Her reason was very weak. She depended wholly upon those around her. She was incapable of originating thought or action. Millie or her brother or the servant had to suggest to her the most ordinary actions. She could make a fire or cook the dinner or wash up the tea-things if anyone set her going; but unless someone told

her, she would never think of beginning herself, though she always seemed pleased to be at work. She was in no way capricious or fretful. She gave no trouble, and was free from delusions — except one.

Nothing could get it out of her head but that there was something wrong with Millie's right ankle. "You don't notice it until you set her on her feet, then you can't but see it." A thousand times she had been assured that Millie's ankle was quite ordinary. A hundred times the girl had taken off shoe and stocking, and showed there was no deformity or defect or weakness. To no purpose. Mrs. Starr would say with the smile of confident assurance, "You notice it at once when you put her standing up by a chair. The ankle gives way, turns out."

"But, mother, I am long past being put standing at a chair, and my ankle is quite straight and firm."

"Yes, dear, no doubt you think so. It may seem so to you, but a mother cannot be mistaken."

Years ago this persistency of his sister about Millie's ankle used to make her brother furious. But of late he had given up taking notice of it, beyond shrugging his shoulders.

The newspaper account of that accident seventeen years before may be summarised as follows:

Ellen Taylor, nurse to Mr. John Greyborne, the well-known contractor, went out on Friday morning, taking Mr. Greyborne's only child, a little daughter of a year old, in the perambulator. Mr. Greyborne, who lost his young wife, a Spanish lady, at the birth of his daughter, occupies a flat in Victoria Street. The nurse had orders from the housekeeper to go to St. James's Park and remain there with the child for two or three hours. Instead of following instructions, Taylor went to a house in a poor part of Chelsea, where a married brother of hers lived with his wife, and where, unknown to Mr. Greyborne or his housekeeper, Ellen Taylor had a child of her own. Mrs. Taylor took the perambulator into the lodging-house and remained there with her brother and child and her brother's wife for half an hour. She left the lodging-house with her young charge and was hurrying over a crossing when she and the perambulator were knocked down. The wheel of the cart passed over the head of the child, who was killed on the spot. The servant was fearfully injured and remained unconscious for days. When she recovered, it was found her brain had been so seriously affected, either by fright or the fall, that she could give no account of the accident, and it was believed she could not long survive, or, if she did, that her rea-

son must be permanently impaired. At the inquest, Mr. Greyborne broke down more than once. No blame was attached to the driver of the cart, as it was proved the horse was frightened by a newspaper flying across him, and bolted, and at the time of the accident was quite beyond the man's control.

The newspapers published a great deal more particulars, but they were not essential.

At that time John Greyborne was the largest railway contractor in the kingdom. He was fifty years of age. Two years before he married for the first time. While on railway business in Spain he met a beautiful girl of twenty, and brought home his young Spanish wife, to lose her a twelvemonth after, and his only child in another year.

Shortly after he lost the child he consulted Dr. D'Alligham, his old friend and medical adviser, about his health. He had no pain or ache, he ate and slept fairly well.

"Just a little out of sorts," said the doctor. "You have made a good deal of money?"

"It's hard for a contractor while in business to say how much he's worth, but I think I can't have less than half a million."

"Half a million!"

"Yes. As you know, I married late in life.

When I was young I was too poor at first and then I was too busy to think of marrying. But I miss the two I've lost, D'Alligham. I took to loving late, but I liked loving when it came—first the wife and then the child—I hadn't both together, you know."

"I know," said the doctor.

"I suppose I miss them without feeling it in a sentimental way, you know. I'm too old for sentiment. But I put it to you in that way, that I must miss them without feeling it, you know, and I am going to retire."

"I know. And you are thinking of retiring on half a million at fifty years of age?"

"Yes. I have plenty to live on. I could live on three hundred a year."

"You could not."

"Oh, yes, I could. I have lived on thirty shillings a week."

"You couldn't live now on thirty thousand a year if you retired."

"Eh?"

"You'll have to double that half a million before you think of retiring. You'll have to work harder to double that half a million than ever you did for that thirty shillings a week."

"But I can never spend even a tenth part of the

interest on half a million, and I have nothing to work for."

"Mark my words, you'll have to work harder to double that half a million than ever you worked before. If you don't, you must find a new doctor; you must take your case somewhere else. You must not come to me again until you have fully made up your mind not to leave off before you have that million."

"You think there's something in that?"

"I am sure. Leave that flat in Victoria Street. Take a house. Go away now and get to work at once. You've been idling I can see. This is the time when I give medical advice to patients, and I have sick people waiting to see me, and you and I must not let our financial talk stand in the way of patients. Come dine with me to-morrow, and we'll go into your financial affairs."

"I will. And you think there's something in it? Eh? You think I ought to leave Victoria Street and take a house and keep at work?"

"I'm sure a man of your age and with your splendid business reputation and knowledge and experience ought not to leave off under a million. And, by the way, Greyborne, try not to think about that sensation you have."

"Of feeling what I've lost without knowing it?"

"It will pass away."

"It comes hard to bear sometimes—even the word Spain in a newspaper. We were married on a Wednesday and she died on a Wednesday. You have heard her sing. Sometimes when I fall asleep after dinner and wake up, I listen. I saw a dictionary, a Spanish dictionary, on an old book-stall to-day. I think 'twas that made me come to you to-day. I was learning the language, you know, and we used to laugh at my gutturals. I'll dine with you to-morrow. After dinner at home now, when I wake and start up and listen expecting to hear her singing—that's worst. I'm prepared for it any other time but then, sorrow of the silence, the silence takes me unawares."

Fifteen years later Mr. John Greyborne retired from business a hale and hearty man, with the million prescribed by Dr. D'Alligham; and now he lived in a fine house in Lancaster Gate, and had for a while been getting materials ready for writing his own life.

Bartholomew Catmur had formed no design of writing an autobiography, but if he had given a true account of that accident which happened seventeen years before, and of his own part and opinions in the matter, it would run somewhat in this way:

"My sister, Ellen Taylor, who goes by the name of Ellen Starr, was always a fool, now she's an idiot. When she went as nurse to Greyborne she told them

she was a widow with no child. She was a widow, but she had a little girl, just the age of Greyborne's baby. My wife looked after Ellen's child. I happened to be at home on the look-out for a job at clairvoyance and magic, or conjuring with patter or anything of that kind.

"When Ellen came into our lodgings the day of the accident she left the perambulator in the passage below and brought upstairs the Greyborne baby. I can't see much difference in babies, except they have different coloured hair or eyes, or are fat and lean, or white and yellow. Ellen's child and Greyborne's were to my mind both the same, and even the mother said she could hardly tell one from the other, only her child had an ankle that turned in when you set it standing by a chair.

"Well, my wife was giving Ellen's child a bath when the mother called, and nothing would satisfy Ellen but to see how her child would look in the grand clothes of the other. So she stripped Greyborne's child and dressed her own one in the grand clothes, and then both women said no one would know which was which.

"Then Ellen must take her own child out in the grand perambulator. Well, Ellen and her own child were run over and Ellen's child was killed, and Ellen herself turned by the accident from the fool she

always was into the idiot she has been ever since.

"No one even suspected the child killed wasn't Greyborne's. My wife and I heard nothing of the accident until the next day. I persuaded partly and partly frightened my wife into holding her tongue. I told her that as she helped to dress Ellen's child in the clothes of the other she might be had up for fraud. My calculation was that Ellen's child being killed and Ellen herself knocked silly by the accident, it would be a good plan to keep Greyborne's child, and wait to see if a reward for giving it back couldn't be worked out of Greyborne. He was rich enough to pay a big reward, and we could bring up the child as Ellen's. If Ellen came to herself by and by, all would be well.

"I didn't want any bother with the inquest. So I got my wife and myself away with Greyborne's child until the inquest was over. Of course I did not expect any reward would be offered by Greyborne. How could I? He firmly believed his child was dead. He and his housekeeper and half a dozen others identified the child by its own looks and the clothes. The landlady told how it was brought into the house and out again by Ellen. No one suspected anything. How could anyone suspect anything? It could not be supposed the accident with the cart was anything but an accident.

"My wife died a year after and never told a soul. Ellen never got back the little sense she had. She was months in the hospital. When she came out I took care to be in the provinces with Greyborne's child. The little thing was two years old before Ellen saw her again, and then she took the child for her own, always insisting that the child is weak on the off foot.

"I brought up the child and gave her good schooling, and when she was old enough I taught her all I knew of clairvoyance and odd tricks and bought new tricks of second-sight for her of an Indian juggler. I put the girl in the show partly because I knew she'd be a sure draw and partly to get her away from Ellen, who Millie fully believes is her own mother. Millie thinks she's my niece. Of course she's nothing at all to me. Her father retired on a million. Millie is now old enough to marry. Some day soon I mean to tell her it is only Ellen's madness makes her think she is Millie's mother. I'll tell her she is nothing at all to me, but that she is to be my wife. Then when we are fast married I'll go to the old man and ask him to give us his blessing, and to make a provision for his daughter, or she'll have to go into Ben's cage to help me make a living for her. That will fetch the old man, I should think, if nothing else will."

CHAPTER IV.

THE TIGER'S KNIFE.

"WILL you walk this way, please?" said Catmur to Mr. Hugh Luxmore that Wednesday forenoon. "Take care, or you may run up against some of the statues in the dark. We shall have more light where the animals are, in the other Cave."

"Thank you," said the young man in a quick, firm voice as he followed his guide.

They reached the menagerie without saying anything more. Here, thanks to skylights in the iron roof, there was the dull, flat, spiritless light of a London misty winter day.

From around came mingled the heavy breathing, snoring sounds of beasts sleeping uneasily. Above rolled the muffled thunder of innumerable iron wheels grinding and clanking under swaying and panting trains.

By the table in the centre of the sawdust-strewn floor were some common wooden chairs. Catmur pointed to one and said, without looking at his visitor, "Will you take a chair?"

"You are very good," said the young man, sitting down and casting around him a sharp glance out of his deep-set bright eyes. As Catmur took another chair and rested his left elbow on the table, so as to keep the knife within reach of his hand, Luxmore brought his eyes back to the showman. "You understood I wished this to be a private interview?"

"Yes. We are alone. Only the dumb beasts can hear us. *The beasts that can talk* haven't come yet." He smiled a hard smile and jerked his thumb over his shoulder towards the Cave of Human Monsters.

"What I have to speak about," said Luxmore, throwing one leg over the other, leaning back in his chair at his ease, and fixing his sharp eyes on the round, fat, florid face of the showman, "is very important; and if you do not at once see the bearing of all, you will, I think, before I have finished."

"I don't fear missing the bearings of anything you may have to tell me," said Catmur, spinning the tiger's knife on the table with his thumb and finger; "only remember my time is short; but we have more than half an hour to ourselves." The blade was too heavy to allow of the knife spinning satisfactorily, and Catmur stopped its motion, drawing the handle nearer to him than it had been.

"Quarter of an hour will be more than sufficient."

"Very well," said Catmur, making another attempt

to spin the knife, and stopping it so that the handle projected over the edge of the table close to his hand. "Go on," he added, flinging himself back in his chair, tightening his lipless mouth and looking the young man full in the face for the first time; "I'm ready to listen."

Luxmore seemed on excellent terms with himself. His manner was one of bland assurance—the bland assurance of a man who out of politeness condescends to play a game with a man who he knows has no chance of winning, no chance of scoring a single point which he himself does not concede.

"I have been abroad," said he, returning Catmur's steady stare out of eyes full of meaning.

"On business or pleasure?" asked Catmur harshly.

"Well, partly on business and partly on pleasure," said Luxmore easily, airily. "I went to Spain on business, the business of my employer, and I came back through Holland for my own pleasure."

"I understand," said Catmur gravely. "But Holland isn't a country people face much to for amusement."

"No, not usually. But I take a great interest in art, and there are many fine works of art in Holland. Before setting out for Spain I had paid a few visits to your admirable entertainment, and hearing that you got your wonderfully cheap busts—those you

sell for a shilling—from Holland, I was anxious to see the country which could turn out admirable works of art at a price which enabled them to be imported into this country and sold with profit at so low a price. Do you follow me?"

"Oh, perfectly," said Catmur through his slightly parted lips. He drew his hand across his mouth and made a click with his tongue, like a man suffering from thirst.

"Now, while I was in Holland I had an idea that if I could only find an enterprising man in England who was on the look-out for a quick way of making money I could give him a hint with a fortune in it. You will, I hope, excuse me, when I say that after seeing the extraordinary value you give to the public in your works of art and your entertainment I conceived the idea of putting the idea before you."

"Very kind, I am sure," said Catmur hoarsely. "May I ask you why you do not carry out the idea yourself? Why do you generously think of me?"

"A most reasonable question," said Luxmore, with a smile and a debonair wave of his hand, "and one which I will answer as frankly as you put it. I want something in return for my idea. I am not in a position to work it myself."

"What is your idea, and then tell me what you want for it?" said Catmur, leaning forward once

more and resting his left elbow on the table. He kept his right hand on his knee just under the projecting haft of the knife.

"You import busts from Holland. You sell them at the low price of a shilling each. There can't be much profit on them at that. Why not have some cast thick and some thin, and manage it so that if you stuff the thin ones with something they would weigh about the same as the thick ones? You could get only thick ones over until the custom-house people got used to them. Then when you began to slip in thin ones, you could break a thick one now and then to show that they were all right, and you could stuff the thin ones with tobacco. I think it's a capital idea, and there ought to be a fortune for you in it."

"He has found out about the tobacco," thought Catmur. "That game is up if I cannot square him. But what does he mean by saying he has been to Spain? That's the talk that puts his life in danger."

Catmur raised his right hand from his knee and tried to spin the knife with his thumb and finger. The moment the blade came over the edge of the table the knife toppled and fell to the ground at his feet. The movement of his feet had brushed aside the sawdust, and the knife rang loudly on the hard ground.

A low growl came from the middle cage on the left.

Catmur turned towards the cage and said softly, "Quiet, Ben. It isn't feeding time just yet. Quiet, beast, you'll get your dinner soon." He did not stoop for the knife, but left it on the ground between his feet.

The tiger yawned loudly, grumbled, and was still.

"There is something in what you say, but it would want to be kept private—very private," said Catmur, looking thoughtfully at the knife on the ground and working the haft up on one of his feet.

"I have not mentioned it to a soul but you."

"You want money, I dare say—a good deal of money—for your idea?"

"Not a penny."

"Eh!" cried Catmur, falling back in his chair with astonishment, and regarding with distended eyes the first man who had ever approached him on business without a view to money. "Not a penny, and you have found out the secret of the cheap busts?"

"Mr. Catmur, I have a confession to make," said Luxmore, leaning forward with his elbows on the table, and dropping his forehead on his hand. "I saw your show before I went abroad. I am a young man. I have the feelings of a young man. I was

greatly impressed by something I saw at your show."

"Impressed with the excellent value they are for the money?" said Catmur, with the manner of a man who is helping the other. "I am not unreasonable. I don't mind coming to terms with you about the busts."

"No. I am not speaking of the casts. The cheapness of the casts filled me with wonder, and I made it my business to find out about them, for I gathered from what I could hear that you did not care for young men hanging about the show, or for admitting them into your private circle, and I wanted to know something that would put me on a different footing in your sight from other young men."

"I see. You wanted to get me in your power, so you ferreted out all about the tobacco that comes over in the thin statues."

The young man took no notice of Catmur.

"I thought," went on Luxmore in a voice of shyness and shame, "that unless I could make you a handsome offer, I would have no more chance of being admitted to your private circle than any other young man. While in Holland I thought of the matter of the statues, and now I should be delighted to make you a present of the idea if you will be so kind as to give me an introduction to Miss Starr.

I ask for your countenance to me as a suitor for her hand." Luxmore put both hands before his face as in shame or confusion, and was silent.

"This man has told me he was in Holland and found out about the tobacco. He has not told me what he found in Spain. He knows too much and Ben is hungry," thought Catmur.

Without a word, without a sound, Catmur stooped and picked up the knife lying between his feet. Then rising stealthily with the knife grasped in his hand, he cast one swift glance around. He drew back his lipless mouth from his yellow teeth and slowly raised the hand holding the knife, and paused a moment with the knife poised in his hand.

Suddenly Catmur's eye caught a movement in the curtains dividing the Cave of Beasts from the Cave of Monsters. The hand holding aloft the murderous knife shook, a sudden pallor spread an ashy hue over his round fat face. He stood a moment irresolute.

CHAPTER V.

MILLIE'S SUITORS.

LUXMORE'S face was still buried in his hands. He saw nothing, suspected nothing, of Catmur's murderous intention, of the death that menaced him.

Catmur's deadly blow had been arrested by the sight of a man's figure between the curtains dividing the menagerie from the Cave of Monsters.

"I beg your pardon," said a low voice, addressing Catmur. "I did not know you were here. I was at the house and heard the tiger roar a while ago as if he saw food. I came to make sure no one was meddling with him. You haven't been feeding him?"

Catmur had dropped his hand and let the knife fall noiselessly to the ground where the sawdust was thick. He flung himself down on his chair with a sardonic laugh.

Luxmore, aroused by the strange voice, raised his head, too late to see Catmur drop the knife. Following the direction of Catmur's eyes, he saw the

intruder. He stared with insolent anger at the man in the archway whose sudden appearance had, unknown to him, saved his life.

"Oh, no," said Catmur, in answer to the question from the curtains and pressing Luxmore's foot under the table. "We were not feeding the tiger. This gentleman and I were only rehearsing part of a new play. We are not quite done yet, Jeff. Leave us for the present."

"Because," said the swarthy man in the archway, "no one is to interfere with the tiger—no one is to feed him—no one is to have anything to do with him but me." He backed out of sight as noiselessly as he had come.

"No one has been interfering with the tiger," said Catmur testily as Jeff withdrew.

The showman was beginning to recover his composure. When he raised the knife he was frantic with fury. When he saw the lion-tamer standing between the curtains he was seized with terror at being caught holding that desperate knife over the drooping man. Now that Jeff was gone reaction was setting in, and he felt angry with the lion-tamer for staying his hand—robbing him of his prey. This man Luxmore knew too much to live. He might even know more than he had hinted at. If Jeff had been half an hour later all would have been safe.

This idiotic Jeff, who hadn't the spirit to want anything beyond food and the tiger, had imperilled the game of him who was playing for a million—a million—a million! With Millie would go all old Greyborne's money. Greyborne had no chick or child—no soul, as he now thought. If he, Catmur, married the girl and then went to old Greyborne and confessed all, what could old Greyborne do but take his daughter to his arms, forgive his daughter's husband and make his daughter's husband his heir? And now, here was this interloping jackanapes arrived with his prying and his significant hints of a visit to *Spain*, whence the girl's mother had come! It was intolerable! Maddening!

Catmur was too much excited to think, to allow himself to speak. Luxmore's manner showed no suspicion of that murderously uplifted knife. No practical result could now come of this interview. Jeff Monday might believe about the play. Jeff was not the man to gossip or ask questions if things passed off quietly. But if an accident now happened to Luxmore, Jeff would remember the uplifted knife, and Jeff's sworn account of what he saw through the curtains would make a very dangerous story for Bartholomew Catmur.

It would not do for this interview between Luxmore and himself to end at the present point. He

must gain time to devise a plan. At the moment his thoughts were dull and confused.

He began walking up and down, his eyes bent on the ground, his hands clasped behind his back, his fat brows drawn low over his small grey eyes. After a few moments he said:

"I'm sorry, Mr. Luxmore, that man interrupted us at such a moment." At the first sound of his own voice self-possession began to return. "That Jeff Monday is a great nuisance, and yet I can't get rid of him. He is the only one who can manage Ben, and Ben is an enormous attraction."

Catmur paused. With the return of his self-possession came an invention the boldness of which took away his breath. Why not pretend that Jeff, the man who wanted nothing but the tiger and food, was already a favoured suitor of Millie's? Only for the ordeal through which he had just passed he would have laughed right out as he said, "You see this Jeff Monday gives me no end of trouble, or I may better say I have a great deal of trouble on Jeff's account, for he thinks of no one but my niece, and my niece, if she has a fancy for anyone, that one is Jeff Monday. He did not steal in upon us because he thought the tiger was getting food, but because he thought you were coming after Miss Starr."

"What! That middle-aged, sooty lion-tamer?" cried Luxmore, astonished.

"Yes. You see women are strange. All of them worship pluck. I expect Jeff's daring with the tiger has fascinated the girl."

"But," said Luxmore decisively, "*you* would not, *you could* not, think of giving such an exquisite creature to that sick nigger!"

"It is true," said the other with a malicious grin, "that *I* might not think much of it, but *she* might think a great deal of it. I'm sure of one thing. Jeff has always a loaded rifle in this place, in case anything go badly wrong with the temper of the beasts, and if Jeff found anyone coming here after my niece he'd put a bullet through that man as freely as he'd shoot a leopard if one of them turned on him. He quite startled me when he stole upon us just now. If he was only certain of your business here to-day, there's no knowing what might have happened. I don't think you noticed me doing it, but the moment I saw him first I took up the knife that was on the table."

For a while each man was busy with his thoughts. An idea was beginning to glimmer before Catmur's mind, but it had not yet assumed definite shape. "I must get this Luxmore man out of the way somehow," he thought, and he waited anxiously the de-

velopment of the idea glimmering in his mind. It was all very well to tell Luxmore that Jeff was Millie's lover, but Jeff cared for no woman in the world—for nothing in the world but the tiger; and Millie cared for no one in the world but his idiot sister, whom she believed to be her mother.

"I must play my trump card," thought Luxmore, throwing his arm over the back of his chair, and clearing his throat with the ostentation of one attracting attention to an important statement. He said aloud:

"Mr. Catmur, I have told you who I am; I have not told you what I am."

"No," said Catmur, walking up and down with eyes fixed on the ground. "But, Mr. Luxmore, I guessed."

"Guessed!" cried the young man profoundly astonished. "Guessed what I am! Impossible! You may *know* what I am, but you couldn't possibly guess. Pray what am I"

"Well," said Catmur, pausing before the young man for a moment and then going on with his walk up and down the menagerie, "I took you for a smuggler."

Luxmore clapped his hands and burst into a loud laugh. "Capital! Capital! Nothing could be bet-

ter. You know, I have the very appearance of a smuggler! But, of course, Mr. Catmur, we all are liable to judge others by our own standards. I am not, however, a smuggler. If you grant the request I made, you and I could do well together. You and I could get on much better together if you have me for a nephew than with that dark-skinned man for one."

Catmur paused in front of his visitor, looked meaningly, searchingly, into Luxmore's face, and said slowly, "It doesn't seem to me as if you'd take informer's money from the government, even supposing we *did* go into the tobacco trade."

"Nothing could be more distasteful to me than to interfere with the cheapness of such admirable busts of the Royal Family as you import from Holland."

"If Jeff Monday marries my niece, don't you see, I shall then have my three great attractions secured to me. I shall have my niece and Jeff and the busts. I own I don't care much for Jeff as my nephew, but if what I have been speaking of came off my three great attractions would still be with me."

"I might not care to take a money reward from the government, but I might take my revenge of someone, and besides I have not yet told you what

I am," said Luxmore, with weighty significance, as he stared up into the face of Catmur above him.

"Not an exciseman?"

"No."

"You're far too thin for an exciseman. Not from Scotland Yard?"

"Oh dear, no!"

"I give it up. What are you?" Catmur screwed up his small grey eyes and fixed his gaze warily, scrutinisingly, on the face of the other. He was sorry that he dropped that knife.

"My name, as you know, is Hugh Luxmore, I am private secretary to a gentleman engaged in writing his own life."

"I don't think any private secretary gets as much wages as a second-class lion-tamer. I must think of my niece. First-class lion-tamers keep private secretaries themselves," said Catmur steadily, without blinking or turning away his eyes from the stare of the other.

"No doubt," said Luxmore, throwing himself back on his chair, thrusting his hands down deep into his trousers pockets, but without moving his eyes. It was a duel in which the spoken words were the feints, the implications the thrusts! "I am assisting the gentleman in writing his life. While looking through papers of seventeen years ago I came upon

your name. The gentleman's wife died young eighteen years ago. Her portrait hangs in my employer's dining-room. When I saw your name I dropped in here to see your show. I fell in love with Miss Starr. No man could help falling in love with so much beauty. She reminded me of the beautiful young wife of my employer. I went to Spain on my employer's business, and there in the form of my employer's dead wife I saw a portrait still more like Miss Starr. Do you take me now, Mr. Catmur? Neither you nor your wife were at the inquest."

Catmur said nothing, but again his lipless mouth opened and his tongue clicked as though he suffered from intense thirst.

Luxmore went on: "You are a business man. So am I. You know too much to let a lion-tamer marry Miss Starr. I cannot tell what your plans are, but I am sure you and I can come to terms. I have no proof. The mere likeness between Miss Starr and the portraits is not enough. You have the proofs and are waiting your own time to produce them. I asked you to give me this interview, so that all between you and me may be quite above-board. If you agree to favour me I shall act honourably and liberally by you. I am private secretary to Mr. John Greyborne. You are a business man and so

am I. I do not want to beat about the bush any longer. If I marry Miss Starr you will get ten thousand pounds for whatever proofs you hold."

Catmur turned away from the table at which he had been standing in front of Luxmore. He resumed his walk with one wrist gripped tightly in the other hand behind his back, to keep himself from laying violent hands on this presumptuous young man—this young man who coolly offered him a hundredth part of the money which was to be his own for his co-operation against himself! Did insolence and daring ever reach such a height before? But he must be calm. This dandified coxcomb must be disarmed for the present, and later got out of the way for good. How was he to be rendered harmless now? How put away for ever? Time! Time! He must gain time.

At length he spoke, with eyes bent on the ground. "There would be a great deal in what you say, if there were anything at all in it, Mr. Luxmore, and ten thousand pounds would be a fair price. But there's nothing in it." He shook his head. He must have a few minutes to think.

"Good heavens, sir! Nothing in it! What do you mean?" cried Luxmore, starting up from his careless attitude and looking at the showman with flashing, angry, surprised eyes. "Do you mean to

say Miss Starr is not the daughter of Mr. John Greyborne?"

"What I say or what you say makes little difference. What we can *prove* is the great thing. Neither you nor I can *prove* your words."

"Not prove them!" cried Luxmore, rising from his chair. "Let us be open with one another. Neither of us is a fool. If you cannot prove them, what good is the whole plot to you?"

"I did not say there was any plot. As far as I am aware there is no plot, except that I do not want to lose either Jeff or Miss Starr. Suppose you were set about proving your words, how would you do it?"

"I should be powerless without you. I offer ten thousand pounds for your help. That is a large sum of money."

"You'd get poor value if I took it. Look at the affair from a reasonable point. There may be this strong likeness you speak of. I take your word for that——"

"You would swear the portraits were painted from Miss Starr. It was the portrait in Mr. Greyborne's dining-room put the idea in my head. The portrait in Spain convinced me."

"Very well, as far as the likeness goes. But what more have we? Nothing. My wife is dead, and my sister lost her reason on the day of the acci-

dent and never recovered it since." Catmur spoke with the air of a man dismissing hope.

"Never recovered her reason!"

"Never. *She* would not help us much. *She* does not believe what you believe about Miss Starr. She is sure Millie is her own child, and a mother ought to be able to tell. She remembers nothing of the accident or the Spanish woman's child. How could she, with a bit of the bone of her skull driven into her brain, remember anything?—prove anything?"

"A bit of the bone of her skull driven in her brain!"

"So a doctor says I took her to long after the accident. He said they ought to have found out what was the matter at the time. You must own you couldn't go on the likeness—the accidental likeness—alone. And you can expect no help from Millie's mother."

"Mrs. Starr can remember nothing at all?" said Luxmore, frowning heavily.

"Why, if she could remember anything it would be against your plot. Your plot is clever, Mr. Luxmore, but Millie is my sister's child. I'm a fair man. I'm willing to come to an understanding with you about my patrons, the Royal Family. But my sister Ellen could not perjure herself for

money—she's too great a fool even for that. Come and see for yourself," and he led his visitor out of the menagerie through the Cave of Magic into Clayton Flat, the space of dreary waste ground at the back of the show.

CHAPTER VI.

AT THE THRESHOLD OF MILLIE'S HOME.

Hugh Luxmore was twenty-eight years of age. He had never been in love with any woman. He was not in love with any woman now. Mildred Starr was not to him what she had been to the men Bart Catmur had warned off, a sentiment or a passion. He saw in her nothing but the heiress of a millionaire. Not that mere money was what he sought. The deity he worshipped was not Mammon pure and simple, as with Catmur. His god was Success.

Luxmore had been left an orphan young, brought up by a kind and generous uncle. This uncle because of his generosity failed in business, failed in life, and died just as Hugh finished a good education at his expense, and was entering the world in the belief that his uncle was rich and that his own future would be made easy and prosperous by a partnership in Luxmore & Co. Unfortunately there was no Luxmore & Co. left. Then the old uncle,

being of no further use to anyone on earth, considered his affairs, and thought it best to die, and died.

At first Hugh felt that the whole affair was a conspiracy against him. But after nursing his injury and wrong for a while he made up his mind, once for all, to repine no more, to avoid all his days anything like the sentimental crimes of his uncle, and later he made up his mind not to fail.

In time he went a step further, and made up his mind to succeed in spite of sentiment—at the expense of sentiment—to succeed by all fair means.

Later still he simplified this resolution and dropped out all considerations but the only one indispensable to success, which is, that one should succeed.

On Clayton Flat the air was cold and raw and dreary and dismal.

Neither man was inclined for talk.

Luxmore had sought the meeting full of confidence. He had gathered from inquiries that there would be no chance of gaining access to the beautiful young clairvoyante except with the full approval of Catmur. That day he had only to declare the cards he held to make Catmur throw up the game.

He had not the shadow of a doubt that Millie was the daughter of John Greyborne. The cheapness of

the busts of the Royal Family astonished him on his first visit to the Caves. They could not be made for the money. Then flashed through his mind an account of how during the Second Empire, interdicted newspapers were smuggled over the French frontier in plaster busts of Napoleon III. Smuggling of some kind would explain the low price of the casts in Catmur's Caves. So far he took no more interest in the affair than in explaining to himself what was of mystery to the common herd. He would have scorned the thought of making use of his guess to the injury of Catmur. He had no desire to injure anyone.

When his eyes first lit on Mildred Starr, he was paralysed by the overwhelming likeness between the living girl and the dead wife of John Greyborne. He set himself to find out all he could about Catmur and his niece. He learned that the sister of Catmur, the supposititious mother of Millie, was afflicted in some dire manner, and that the girl was kept in complete isolation. He had no notion the elderly showman who played the part of uncle had any intention of marrying this girl. First or last, this thought never entered his mind. He now resolved to find out all about the busts, so that he might use the knowledge with Catmur as a lever to open the door to Millie, for no sooner had he come to the con-

clusion that Mildred Starr was Greyborne's daughter than he made up his mind that the millionaire's daughter should be his wife.

He was sent to the house of the dead wife by Mr. Greyborne, on business connected with the autobiography. There he saw a portrait of Mrs. Greyborne, painted when she was a girl. This portrait confirmed his conviction that Mildred Starr, of Catmur's show, was the same as the baby Inez Greyborne reported killed at a crossing in Chelsea, seventeen years before.

Luxmore came home from Spain by Holland. On his way he found out how the smuggling was carried on. Having this knowledge, he felt absolutely certain of success with Catmur. He did not mean to injure the showman. He had no objection to Catmur smuggling tobacco till the crack of doom. He would let Catmur know that he had found out about the tobacco, merely to gain Catmur's ear. When Catmur's attention was secured he would offer ten thousand pounds for the showman's aid. Only that he had forsworn sentiment for ever, he would have appeared in his own eyes as an indulgent judge and a magnificent patron.

And now this man had calmly told him there was nothing in his whole scheme, that his theory could not be proved, was a pure fiction, that the Mrs. Tay-

lor of seventeen years ago was a hopeless idiot, who could not be produced in evidence to prove his case, first, because of her mental infirmity, and second, because she would be dead against his theory. And then finally came the most monstrous statement of all—that this millionaire's daughter was as good as engaged to this lion-tamer.

Luxmore's mind was at a dead stop. He came prepared to give Catmur ten thousand pounds, and if the showman had asked for double that amount, for any sum at all in reason, Luxmore would have been only too glad to promise it. But Catmur said there was no truth in his supposition, or, any way, what came to the same thing, that nothing could be proved. Could it be that all his dream of wealth and greatness was smoke?

Catmur had no doubt at all as to what must happen. This young man knew too much—knew a great deal more than was good for him. He must be put away. He was a desperately dangerous young man. At any moment he might go to the authorities about the tobacco. At any moment he might tell Greyborne that Millie was the Inez he mourned. It might be that Luxmore could prove nothing about Millie, but if once the girl even suspected Ellen was not her mother, and that all his kindness to the imbecile woman and herself had been done to enable

him to marry her because she was the child of a rich old man, then there was no knowing what might happen; only it was absolutely certain at all events that Millie would not marry him. Of course, when approaching her on the subject of marriage, he must not tell Millie she was not Ellen's child. He must tell her that Ellen was not his sister, but the daughter of a man to whom he was under great obligations, and that merely for convenience' sake he gave out that he was Ellen's brother when he found the daughter of his old friend destitute in the world with an infant child.

In his career as a showman he had continually to draw on his imagination for his bills and speeches to the crowd, and descriptions of the objects and specimens and performances at his show. But never had he devised any fiction so wildly far away from fact as that Jeff Monday, the lion-tamer, had ever shown more interest in Millie Starr than in the plaster cast of the arm of Thothmes II. in the Cave of Sculptures, or the umbrella-haired man in the Cave of Monsters.

Jeff Monday was the least obtrusive member of Catmur's whole show. In the hours of darkness he acted as night watchman. He attended to all the beasts. Daily in the forenoon he spent an hour or two at Catmur's house, lending a hand in any rough

work, and now and then, when the weather was fine, wheeling out Mrs. Starr for a little air in a bath chair around Clayton Flat. Not that Mrs. Starr was unable to walk, but that she could not be trusted out except when led by the hand or in a bath chair, owing to her liability to stray.

The rest of Jeff's day was spent about the show, and often from one sunrise to the next Catmur never exchanged a word with the lion-tamer.

From long dwelling with beasts of the forest his eyes had got that far-away look of theirs. Neither his glance nor his thoughts ever seemed concerned with things around him, except with the beasts when he was performing with them. His face never had any expression except rarely when he was gazing upon the tiger, intractable to all but him, and then only when he believed himself unobserved by human eyes. Those who had seen the man's face during those rare moments when he turned to the tiger never forgot that look of yearning, melting, overwhelming tenderness. It haunted the beholders for days. They never forgot it. There was in it a look of ultimate love, as though the very soul of the man were caressing the hideous brute with tenderness too fine ever to be spoken with mortal lips. That look of love for the tiger in the man's face was more awful than all the terrors of the tiger's self.

It was the one look of a lonely spirit from its prison of loveless solitude into the garden of the heart.

Catmur had seen that look, and ever afterwards stood back from Jeff Monday, as may stand back a man of blood and rapine who stumbles unawares into a sanctuary where a strange man prays by night.

And now Catmur had taken a liberty with Jeff behind Jeff's back, and said that Jeff was in love with Millie!

Jeff would not know the meaning of the words if they were spoken to him. He might or he might not resent them if they were spoken and explained to him. Catmur had often thought of chaffing the lion-tamer about the imbecile widow, with whom Jeff was almost as gentle as with the tiger, but then the showman remembered the look of intolerable tenderness he had seen Jeff bestow upon the tiger, and he never rallied the lion-tamer, not even once.

"I taught Millie all the magic and second-sight she knows," thought Catmur, "but there is some magic in that man that I could not teach him, that no man ever taught him, that he learned either Above or Below."

Thus, although Catmur was the master and Monday the man, the master stood back from the man

as from one knowing things Catmur could not understand.

But though the showman felt a nameless respect for the lion-tamer, the present was not a time for delicate niceties. Luxmore here was threatening the edifice it had taken him nearly twenty years to build. He meant to marry the girl and get her father's money. He had said recklessly, unthinkingly, that Jeff was in love with Millie. Out of that invention had just sprung into his mind a sure plan for Luxmore's destruction. Half an hour ago he raised a knife to do the work in a clumsy and a dangerous way. If he could only get this young interloper walking beside him to take the bait he was preparing in his mind for him, Luxmore would be blotted out, and no one but Luxmore himself would be to blame.

"I told you," Catmur said, turning to the private secretary when they reached the house, "that Jeff Monday is thinking of marrying Millie. Come, I'll make a bargain with you. If we succeed we can talk about other things. First, you can see Millie's mother and judge for yourself whether she would be much good to you in the witness-box. Then I'll tell you how you can cut out Jeff Monday with the girl."

"Then you own," cried Luxmore in great excite-

ment, "that there is something in my theory about Miss Starr being John Greyborne's daughter."

"I will own nothing just now. Come in, as we are here. I'll tell you my plan when you have seen my sister Ellen."

CHAPTER VII.

THE SPOKE IN THE WHEEL OF MEMORY.

Catmur's household consisted of himself, his sister, Millie and Susan, a square-built, low-browed, illiterate domestic servant, whom Catmur had chosen for her thick dulness, and who, he found to his great comfort, possessed the invaluable virtue of believing what she was told to believe without the will or the power of question. If, on being asked why she thought the world stood still, she could say, "Master told me," she would consider the inquiry disposed of for ever, as far as it related to her. Not that she had any exalted faith in Catmur, but "Master told me" was a convenient form for getting rid of all responsibility and referring the question to headquarters. If master had not told her anything at all about the matter, she would never herself get into the difficulty of saying the world stood still. If asked her opinion, she would say with a vacuous look, "Don't know, I'm sure." The only thing she was sure when left to herself was that she didn't know.

Susan admitted Catmur and Luxmore, and told her master that Mrs. Starr was in the parlour, and Miss Starr was in her own room.

"We only want to see Mrs. Starr for the present," whispered Luxmore to the showman. He did not want to take his mind off the main business.

Susan was too dull to feel curiosity in the extraordinary event of her master bringing a stranger to the house; she only felt unsettled and uncomfortable.

Mrs. Starr, a tall, thin, gentle-looking woman, with fresh, youthful colour in her cheeks, sat knitting in the parlour window-place. She raised her eyes and smiled as the two men entered. Then she looked down again and went on with her knitting.

"Mr. Luxmore here is a friend of mine, Ellen," said Catmur, with a gesture introducing the young man and inviting him to a seat. "He has an idea that Millie may come into some money or something if you can only bring yourself to remember what happened long ago—you know, the day of the accident. Now do the best you can to recollect." Catmur was in no hurry. He wanted to think out his plan, and he knew nothing could come of this interview.

Mrs. Starr smiled at the visitor. Whenever roused or disturbed she always smiled. "It was dreadful," she said in slow, soft accents, "and I was to blame.

It was all my fault. But I did not see what happened, and as I did not see it then I cannot see it now. How could I?" The expression of the woman's face was one of contented absent-mindedness, not mania or delusion.

"But," said Luxmore, observing the gentle-faced woman closely, "how was it you did not see? Surely you were there?"

"All at once it happened in a fog—a cloud."

"The accident."

"Accident? Accident? Was there an accident? There was an accident, but it was long before, and it made Millie's foot weak—her right foot weak. When you stand her against a chair you notice it at once." She looked down. The knitting had not ceased. She shook her head softly over the unfortunate delicacy of the baby's ankle.

"But Miss Starr is grown up now and able to walk about, and does not need to be kept up by a chair, and has no weakness of the foot," said Luxmore, looking in perplexity at Catmur, who was staring out of the window into the murky daylight lying on the dreary Flat.

The showman merely shook his head without changing the direction of his eyes.

Mrs. Starr smiled again and shook her head. "You must not tell a mother about her child. Set

Millie standing by a chair and you will see the right foot is weak. I ought to know. Who can know, if her mother does not?" Her tone was as soft as though the words were murmured in soliloquy over her sleeping baby.

"She is always the same," said Catmur in a low voice to Luxmore. "You will not get anything more out of her if you keep at it till night." His plan was now completed in design.

"The thing I am speaking of may be a matter which will come into court, Mrs. Starr," said Luxmore in desperation, "and what I want to know is whether you are quite sure Mr. Greyborne's child was in the perambulator that day seventeen years ago you were so unfortunately run over and cruelly hurt in Chelsea?"

"I wish it was brought into court," said the woman, leaning forward in her chair and looking from Catmur to Luxmore with her quiet, confident smile. "I wish it was brought into court, and then I could make it all plain."

"All what?" said Luxmore eagerly.

Catmur shrugged his shoulders and laughed a short, sharp laugh, like a bark.

Luxmore looked angrily at the showman, saying, "Don't interfere now. Let her speak."

"Let her speak!" cried Catmur scornfully. "Of

course; I'm not hindering her. But for improving talk give me a parrot in place of *her*."

The young man turned to the imbecile. "You were saying, Mrs. Starr, that if this case went into court you could prove Mr. Greyborne's child was not in the perambulator on the day of the accident."

She looked at him with the same unruffled smile on her gentle face. "My name was not Starr then, and if lawyers say in court it was Greyborne I'll tell them I don't remember, but very likely it was, as I soon forget. But I can tell them that if they set the child standing by a chair they will see with their own eyes what I saw with my own eyes and felt with my own hands—that the child's right foot is weak. And then, if they won't take the word of a mother—and a mother ought to know—they will have to take the sight of their own eyes that the ankle turns in." She nodded her head and looked down at her knitting, which had never been interrupted during the talk.

"Are you satisfied?" said Catmur, rising. "I told you there was no hope here. But come, I must get back to the show, and I have a plan in which there *is* hope, in which there is certain success. As far as *she* is concerned you only waste time. Come here."

Catmur approached his sister, and placing his hand on her head, pressing back the brown hair

streaked with grey from the placid brow, said to Luxmore, "Put your finger here."

The woman did not move. Her eyes were fixed upon the knitting in her lap. The smile called up by the certainty of a mother's knowledge respecting the blemish in her child still rested on her lips.

Under his finger he felt in the bone of the skull a depression an eighth of an inch deep with a surface just covered by the tip of his finger.

"That's what the doctor spoke of. That's the spoke driven into the wheel of memory. Now come away. I have no more time to lose, and I want to tell you my plan. This doesn't amuse you, and it doesn't amuse me. For years and years it has been just the same. Not a ray beyond what you have seen. You can take her over the same ground again, but there's no new ground. You never can get a yard further than you've been just now. I told you how this would be; but there's nothing like seeing for yourself. Now let us put her out of our mind and talk business."

The two men were once more on the desolate waste surrounding Catmur's house. The dull, chilly air lay motionless upon the worn, rugged ground. The sky was dull, opaque, spiritless. The edges of Clayton Flat were blurred with thin grey mist, streaked with sodden, faint-blue smoke. From all

sides came the muffled rattle of railway carriage tires, the heavy rumble of high engine wheels weighted with ponderous clanking bars. There was not a soul in view. The mean curtain of smoke and mist cut off the mean, soilless earth from the open, wholesome day and the eyes of kindly man.

"I have thought the whole thing out," said Catmur, catching the young man's arm, "and I have a plan that cannot fail, if you have the pluck to carry it out. Have you?"

Luxmore turned towards his companion and said, "I'll play any game so long as I know what I play for. I'll lay *any* stake in a game if I *want* to play."

"That's enough," said Catmur, releasing the young man's arm. "When you came to me to-day, you said, 'Hear me out.' Now I say to you, 'Hear me out.' Take in all my words, and in them, as in the words you said to me this morning, there may be meanings that everyone would not catch, and there may not. Any way, make the most of what I say." Catmur spoke with great impressiveness, nodding his head at the ground to give his words the weight of a soliloquy overheard.

"Go on," said Luxmore, drawing his hat down over his eyes, and thrusting his hands deep into his pockets. "The girl was very beautiful, but beauty was only skin-deep. John Greyborne, her father,

had a million of money, and the beauty of money permeates and pervades all things on earth, was what no other thing on earth ever could be—Enough."

Catmur drew his hand across his lipless mouth and spoke with the manner of a man who had finally made up his mind:

"I told you I thought there was something more than liking between this girl and Jeff Monday. Jeff Monday has no thought of getting money with her beyond her salary, and maybe a trifle from me when I die. He's a terribly headstrong man, and I could not rely on him to share with me if he came into a great fortune through his wife. There's a mistaken belief that I have Jeff cheap. Why, only for what I paid him I'd be a rich man. He knows about the statues, and I have to give him just what he asks."

"A blackmailer?" said Luxmore in disgust.

"Jeff Monday is the most heartless blackmailer in London, in England, in the world, and—you must swear to keep all I am saying between us two."

Luxmore swore most solemnly.

"And I'd like to do him a bad turn if I could without his knowing I did it. Then you say, like the gentleman you are,"—Catmur drew his hand across his mouth to conceal a smile,—"that you'd

give me ten thousand pounds if you came into a large fortune——"

"I'd gladly double it."

"You have the heart and the open hand of a prince." Catmur coughed slightly. "Well, now, not to go too deeply into the matter, *you* would suit me much better in many ways than Jeff, and I'll help you all I can. Maybe my wife left some account of that accident behind her, and maybe she did not——"

"What!" shouted Luxmore, trembling with eager excitement.

Catmur took no notice of the interruption, but went on.

"I can't do much for you. All can be done by yourself."

"Mr. Catmur, there is nothing on earth I would not do to succeed in this case." Luxmore was beside himself with joy. He had come to Catmur certain of victory; he had encountered defeat, despair; and now once more burst upon his enraptured gaze a vision of triumph.

"Wait," said Catmur, shaking a warning finger at the young man. "You have not heard me out yet."

"No matter what the conditions are I accept them. I'll put down my life against the chance."

"Wait," repeated Catmur, repeating his minatory

gesture; "hear me out. You may have noticed that I did not call the girl downstairs when you were at my place just now——"

"My visit was a business one," said Luxmore, a little disturbed by the recollection of his want of gallantry in not even asking to see Miss Starr.

"Quite a business one, plain enough," said Catmur, drawing once more his hand across his mouth to hide a smile. "I did not wish to introduce you to her now. I told you the girl favours that common man Jeff Monday, because of his daring with the tiger. Women always are caught by showy pluck. Showy pluck—bah! Why, I taught *her* all she knows of magic and second-sight. I taught Jeff Monday all *he* knows of lion-taming. I don't think anything has been said between the girl and Jeff yet. But she's just as stiff-necked and determined as Jeff; and if once she gives him her word she'll marry him in spite of me and all the world."

"But," cried Luxmore, taking his hands out of his pockets and wiping his forehead, grown moist in fierce excitement, "there is time yet to prevent her giving him a promise. If she has not given him her word there is no question of her keeping it."

"No; but go gently. You must remember she has been brought up, I may say, in my show. She has never been out in the world. She thinks the

show *is* the world, and she thinks the lion-tamer of the show is the greatest man on earth, greater than any general or any king."

"Well?" cried Luxmore breathlessly.

"Well, my plan is that I should dismiss my lion-tamer."

"Yes?"

"And that you should take his place."

CHAPTER VIII.

CATMUR'S PROPOSAL TO LUXMORE.

Luxmore drew up and started back in astonishment. For a few moments he was speechless. Catmur folded his arms across his chest and stood gravely, solemnly nodding at the ground, as though to imply that the people of earth lacked intelligence enough to understand him, but that to the great earth itself, to the foundation of all our being, he was quite plain; with it he was in confidential relations.

"Mr. Catmur," said Luxmore, when at last he found his voice, "I did not come here to be trifled with. This is not a jesting matter. You are not now dealing with Mrs. Starr."

"I know I am not dealing with my sister," said Catmur regretfully. "Great a fool as Ellen is, she would at once see the force of what I am saying. She would at once see that there is no way for any man to the girl's heart but through deeds of daring. She would see that a rival to Jeff would be in the girl's

eyes but another man who has dared the tiger. She would see I am not advocating anything difficult or unreasonable. I am not asking you to play the fat woman, or the umbrella-haired man, or the spotted boy; your gifts do not lie in the way of any of these attractions. You haven't a call that way. Nature did not intend you for the boneless man, or the human shadow, or the electric lady. But as a lion-tamer—bah! A person without any gifts at all can be a lion-tamer. I taught Millie all she knows of second-sight and magic. It was I gave Jeff Monday the power he shows over the tiger. Why, it's all a trick, a trick of the trade. I would sell it to any man if I could get a price that would pay. If you and I are going to do business together I'll teach it to you in the bargain."

Catmur uttered this long speech in the tone of a dreamy soliloquy. As it went on he raised his eyes and gazed before him, unfolded his arms, and with his left wrist held in his right hand behind his back walked on like a somnambulist.

"Mr. Catmur," said Luxmore in a voice of protest and irritation, "you must know that what you suggest is absurd and impossible. You cannot persuade me that for a moment you propose I should take the place of lion-tamer in your entertainment. Only the case is so serious I should think you are

laughing at me." Luxmore was beginning to wonder if there was insanity in Catmur's family. Was ever anything madder than Catmur's jokes?

The showman stopped in his walk, looked into the face of the other, and putting his hand on Luxmore's shoulder, said, with ponderous emphasis, "I dare say a private secretary has a busy life, and cannot spare much of daylight for joking. A showman's life is a very busy one too, and *he* cannot spare a minute of daylight or gaslight for joking to amuse himself. Cobblers are always badly shod, and showmen, when at liberty to amuse themselves, never amuse themselves, but abandon themselves to poetry and mournful thoughts. I am a showman, but I am not a corner man in a Christy minstrel troupe. I *am* not joking, young man. I can spare only another minute. I'll tell you my plan in a few simple words."

"If it involves the lion-taming business, you may spare yourself the trouble, Mr. Catmur," said Luxmore peevishly.

The showman, holding the secretary by the shoulder, swayed him gently to and fro as he said:

"Listen to me. You are not to speak to a soul about what I am going to tell you. It is the deepest trade secret in the trade. All lion-taming is done with a drug, a perfume. You simply sprinkle that perfume over you, and if you can get near enough to

the brute to insure his smelling it before he springs, you may go up to the most savage beast in any show. I will not tell you the name of the drug now. I will tell you later. Even Jeff doesn't know the name of the drug. Every performance I give him enough for the time. If he knew the secret as you shall know it, he might turn his back on me, and throw me over. I must leave you now. You had better not be seen with me by either Miss Starr or Jeff; they might suspect something, and Jeff is always armed. Come to me at the same hour to-morrow with word that you have made up your mind. I tell you it is your only chance. If you do not take my suggestion you will never succeed. Come to me to-morrow at the same hour with your mind made up. Good-bye now; I must go."

Bart Catmur re-entered the show by the back door, leaving the young man alone on Clayton Flat.

Hugh Luxmore was not easily diverted from his purpose when his object was of no great importance. In the present case the matter was of gigantic importance,—nothing less than marrying the only child of a millionaire widower who now believed he was without a single relative in the world.

Luxmore's scheme had been to pay Catmur handsomely for favouring his suit with the beautiful young clairvoyante, marry her while she was ignorant of

her parentage, and then bring forward Catmur to confirm the story of the substitution of Ellen Taylor's child for the child of Mr. Greyborne. He would of course tell Mr. Greyborne that he married Miss Starr in perfect innocence of her true history, and with no other design than to own the most beautiful and the best wife in England. Then matters should take their course, and what course could they take but that of John Greyborne making Mildred, his lost Inez, his heiress?

The private secretary was in no way insensible to the extraordinary loveliness of Mildred Starr. Had he gone to the Caves merely out of curiosity he might have fallen in love with the exquisite clairvoyante. It would be rash to say had he fallen in love with her he would not marry her were he sure she and Catmur were really niece and uncle, and that he could hope for little or no fortune. But no sooner had he set eyes on her than the amazing likeness between her and the portrait of the dead Mrs. Greyborne took exclusive possession of him. He could think of nothing but what a magnificent stroke it would be for him to marry one of the richest heiresses in London—in England—in the whole world. The person of the girl was completely obscured by the stupendous pile of gold surrounding her. She was everything that was most desirable; so were

thousands of girls, but how many had a claim upon a million sterling? Were there a hundred? Were there ten? Were there five? And even supposing there were ten, would he, Hugh Luxmore, ever have the remotest chance of exchanging a word with one of these heiresses, to say nothing of approaching one as a lover.

His discovery about the tobacco gave him a double hold on Catmur. He had told himself a hundred times before that Wednesday forenoon, that with two such strings to his bow he could not fail with the showman. Yet here he was, after all, with Catmur gained over and yet no real progress made. Both his strings had proved useless, for he had been shooting at the wrong mark.

According to Catmur's own account, the girl would marry whom she pleased,—this swarthy lion-tamer in all likelihood. There must be a complete reconsideration of his own plan. He owned he had received a check, but until the girl was married to this creature he would not admit he had been defeated. He had no intention of being defeated. He meant to win yet. Why, it would be a monstrous absurdity to lose; and for *him*, Hugh Luxmore, to lose this prize, and to such a rival! The bare thought was grotesque.

Grotesque as the thought of losing might be, it

was nothing like so absurd as the notion of his turning lion-tamer for the sake of this girl, for the sake of this marriage. He had, of course, no more thought of doing anything of the kind than he had of taking to street tumbling or the Punch-and-Judy business. But it made him uncomfortable to think that the woman upon whom he had set his mind, whom fate seemed to destine for him, should be swayed by mere displays of brutal courage in which the life of an admirer was uselessly exposed to the fury of a beast profitless to man.

Of course, no one could know Mildred Starr better than her uncle, and now that he had declared himself on Luxmore's side Catmur had every inducement to help the man whose marriage would bring him in twenty thousand pounds. It was as clear as the sun at noon that Mildred was old Greyborne's daughter. It was as clear as the sun at noon that Catmur knew this. It was almost certain that Catmur could prove Millie's parentage if he chose. That hint about a history of the fatal day left by Catmur's wife had, no doubt, substantial foundation in fact. How much it would prove could not be told, but hardly very much, or Catmur would have used it long ago, and extorted a vast reward from Greyborne. No doubt the reason why Catmur had kept silence so long was because the proofs held in his hands were

weak. It was not a case that would have to be proved in a court of law. It would have to be proved only to one person, John Greyborne, who would be willing to be convinced, and whose conviction would be helped forward more by the extraordinary likeness between the portrait of his dead wife and the living girl than by all the legal evidence in the world set forth in the most formal state.

What had been Catmur's intention if Hugh Luxmore had never turned up? It was incredible that he would allow the girl to marry the lion-tamer. That talk about keeping the clairvoyante and the lion-tamer in the show was pure nonsense in the face of Mildred's parentage. The girl perhaps had a leaning towards this dark man of forbidding face, but Catmur had only put forward that theory with the intention of extracting a larger bribe from Luxmore. He had offered twenty thousand pounds, and in no other way than by aiding his marriage with the girl could the secret bring in so much money to the showman. Why, twenty thousand pounds would be a large fortune to a man in Catmur's position.

It might be that Catmur considered his proofs inadequate. Catmur had had no means of knowing the wonderful likeness between daughter and mother. Supposing the document signed by the showman's wife was a full account of the substitution of Mrs.

Taylor's child for Greyborne's in the perambulator, and suppose the fact that the change of clothes was satisfactorily accounted for by the paper, the assumption would be that it was written at the suggestion, nay, even upon the compulsion, of Mrs. Catmur's husband, and she being dead it would have little more weight than Catmur's own word. Of course, the paper might have been witnessed, and the witnesses might be alive and forthcoming. But it would be regarded with suspicion.

Catmur's imbecile sister was absolutely useless as evidence. If ever there breathed an idiot, she was one. In all her mind gleamed not a single ray of intelligence.

Was ever a case of such tremendous moment so environed by difficulties? Here was the only child of one of the richest men in the country performing at a cheap show and in danger of being married to a lion-tamer who looked as if he had nigger blood in his veins!

If this idiot woman Starr or Taylor had only kept her reason, all would have been easy. If she could tell what happened on the fatal day, the case would be plain and simple. If this woman had only kept her reason! If she could only get it back!

Could she get it back?

Could Ellen Starr or Taylor get back her memory and reason after all these years?

What a distracting thought!

He had heard of a depressed bone being raised by an operation and reason and memory reviving in the brain, beginning at the moment they had been suspended by the depression.

He must think of this. If the thing could be done, it would revolutionise the situation. He must think of it and get the very best opinion money could procure. If the best surgical advice that money could procure said there was a chance of Mrs. Taylor or Starr recovering her memory under an operation, that operation must be tried. But how?

How could he secure Catmur's consent to the operation? There was no use in thinking of securing the consent of the afflicted woman. She would "consent" to anything she was told to do. She was not to be taken into account. But Catmur? If he objected, what then?

Well, rather than fail altogether, the operation must be performed if it promised anything; and as to Catmur's consent, why, if it could not be got, it must be dispensed with. That was all.

"Of course I'll keep the appointment with Catmur to-morrow at the same hour. Of course, under no

conditions can I have anything to do with that tiger."

This was Hugh Luxmore's final thought on his way back to Mr. Greyborne's house, Lancaster Gate.

As he made it, Bart Catmur was making up his mind that if Hugh Luxmore did not fall into his views about the lion-taming business, the secretary would have a great deal to do with the tiger, so much that after the interview of to-morrow Hugh Luxmore would never again be troubled about selecting an occupation in life.

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE CAVES.

Bartholomew Catmur was not a man of nice feelings. He did not trouble himself much about questions of conscience. He was too politic to declare that he thought conscience a purely feminine virtue, without which a man was all the better. In the secret depths of his mind he believed that conscience in a man was useful to those men who could make a good thing of it.

He was not irreligious at all, for he had no religion, decried no religion. If people began talking of religion in his presence, he simply began thinking of something else. He never used profane language, for it had no horror for him, and he had noticed that many people objected to profanities. He was never angry with pious people. He simply set them down among those who did not as a rule patronise shows. He recognised the fact that many other people did not patronise shows. Whether pious people were excellent or not never troubled his mind. The

world was wide enough for all. He himself had no bigoted belief in shows. He had been brought up a showman. Showmanship was his profession, and he followed it sincerely, but without blinding enthusiasm. He was under no delusion that his business was a noble or exalted one. He did not care to inquire what a noble or exalted business was. He knew that a clever, careful showman could make money, and he looked on Catmur's Caves merely as a trade speculation. If he could come by more money without the Caves, he would give them up. If, for instance, he could marry a wife who was heiress to an old man with a million, he would lock up the Greatest Show *Under* the Earth to-morrow.

He was not a man who ever talked unnecessarily of his affairs. The present crisis would have imposed silence on a communicative man. It is likely that if Catmur had had the selection of his own household, he would have chosen people possessing the characteristics of the three women now under his roof. For a man cherishing secrets which would develop malignant force if ever they got beyond his control, what could be better than the gentle, trusting, unnoticing sister, who had lost her wits; than the young girl Millie, who looked up to this woman as a mother afflicted by Heaven and to him as an earthly Providence, who was so young and

guileless in the world's ways; and then Susan, the stolid maid, who never thought at all, and regarded herself solely as an instrument of authority, and all authority for the present as vested in Bartholomew Catmur.

He was not going to palter with the present situation. The show and the household on Clayton Flat were his preserves, and if any man came prying or poaching there, that man came at his own risk, with his life in his hands.

This young man Luxmore had come both prying and poaching. He had pried into the tobacco affair, and had coolly announced his intention of marrying Millie! If this young man informed the authorities about the smuggling, Catmur would be ruined; if this young man either married Millie or told John Greyborne that the daughter he mourned as dead was living, Catmur would never have a claim upon the great fortune he hoped to acquire through his marriage with John Greyborne's daughter.

Very well. He had not sought the acquaintance of this young man; if this young man came to-morrow, let him take his chance with the tiger. Catmur had told him there was no way of gaining the girl's notice except by conspicuous courage—in fact, except by occupying Jeff Monday's place in the show. Most likely Luxmore would refuse the post of

lion-tamer to-morrow. Then instead of becoming Catmur's lion-tamer the secretary should have a trial of tiger-taming.

Of course Catmur meant what he said about giving Luxmore the part filled by Jeff. But he had not meant to discharge Jeff. Luxmore should fill Jeff's place only for a short time—a few minutes. He had intended going through the form of anointing Luxmore with some drug, persuading the young man to enter the cage, and then leaving Luxmore to get on as best he could with the beast.

Afterwards it would be easy to say that Luxmore was frantically in love with Millie, and conceived the mad idea that the only way to attract the girl's regard was by emulating the feats of Jeff Monday with Ben. That Catmur laughed at the idea, but Luxmore would not be gainsaid, and stole, unknown to Catmur, into the show, and placing his faith in some useless drug, the odour of which was fabled to captivate the larger flesh-eating animals and render them docile, went into the tiger's cage, with the melancholy result that he lost his life.

Catmur could make his story all the more plausible by getting Jeff Monday to swear that the theory of the drug was absurd, but hardly more absurd than that he entertained any feelings of a warm nature for Miss Starr, or that she had ever shown

any favour to him beyond what she, out of her own goodness, would display to a faithful, humble servant of Bartholomew Catmur.

The only question which had given Catmur any anxiety in this scheme was, Would it be possible to get through the legal part of it without disclosing the parentage of Millie? It would not suit him at all that her identity should be made known at this stage of the plot. But when he proposed to Luxmore that he should take Jeff's place he had made up his mind to risk that.

Now it seemed more than likely Luxmore would refuse to be anointed and enter the tiger's cage. The alternative scheme was, perhaps, after all, better. The story in Catmur's evidence then would be the same, only that the moment Luxmore opened the cage to enter it the tiger sprang out, with the melancholy result that Luxmore lost his life.

The scheme was complete, so far. Catmur had told Luxmore to come in by the back way. The secretary would enter the Caves unknown to a soul but Catmur. The showman, having arranged everything, would meet him there, and the rest was simple enough. The rest needed no doing. It would do itself.

That day Catmur was in exceptionally good spirits

during the afternoon performance. In the Cave of Sculpture a troupe of tumblers and equilibrists performed; and between their feats Catmur expounded the works of art around him.

He made jokes about the arms of Thothmes, and asked the young ladies how they would like to have an arm eight feet long and as thick as a poplar round their fifteen-inch waists. The origin of the saying, kicking up a row, came from the time when the Colossus of Rhodes, a cast of whose foot lay here, stepped off the land and walked up through the water to the town to complain of the inferior Macadam put down in his neighbourhood. Here were "Night and Morning" by Michael Angelo, and a good job, too, they were divided by twelve hours; for, if they chanced to meet, there would be such a fight as never before was seen in civilised parts. Here was a huge Roman wine pitcher, which would hold enough to make the most experienced temperance band unable to sing coherently, "We won't go home till morning." This was the head of an Egyptian ram. Catmur was sorry to say he hadn't a man-of-war ram here, but an Egyptian ram and a man-of-war ram were about the one size, and it was out of horns of such rams as this one that the best fog-horns of our men-of-war of to-day were turned. This was the cast of what a human eye would be like

if we lived on a planet as big as the sun and were built in proportion to that great luminary. Although this eye was a cast, they would observe there was no cast in the eye. How would young ladies like to be ogled by eyes that size? This was a whale's jaw-bone. The roof of the whale's mouth was gone. It would be no wonder if the roof was blown off in which there was so much jaw. This was the jaw of a male whale. Catmur left visitors with great imaginations to fancy, if they could, what must be the size of the female whale's jaw? His own opinion was that it couldn't even be imagined.

The afternoon performance at the Caves was never so well attended as the one in the evening. For one statue of the Royal Family sold in the earlier entertainment half a dozen went off by night. To-day, however, there happened to be a larger attendance of people than usual, and Catmur found more buyers for the busts than any previous day in the new year.

"I'll give you the statues for nothing, these marvellous works of art free, and throw in a monkey and a tiger just to make home homelike, if you get busts as good as these anywhere else for twice the money. Mind you, there is no Luther Lane Italian sugarstick-and-taffy art about them statues—they are genuine. You don't get works of art like these

by turning the handle of a hand-organ, and you can't make them out of ice-cream under an awning strapped on a frame of blue and yellow striped barber's poles. Royal Academicians come here all the way from Burlington House in Piccadilly to see these statues of the Royal Family. These Royal Academicians don't come here, of course, when the doors are open to the general public, but they slip in during the off time, just to get a look at these figures. They would not dare to buy them and carry them home, for they knew if once statues of such merit were seen in their studios they would be cut out and never get another order except one for the House from the relieving officer. Ladies and gentlemen, I like to see pleasant faces about me, and a joke lightens the way. But I give you my word of honour that these are the cheapest plaster of Paris busts in Europe."

The course of the performance was, first, the tumbling or performing dogs or equilibrists or learned pigs, followed by the sale of casts in the Cave of Sculptures.

This Cave was separated from the Cave of Busts by two sliding doors concealed from view on each side by heavy folding curtains.

When the performance in the first Cave was over the sliding doors were rolled back and the audience

invited to enter the Cave of Beasts, the curtains being gathered away from the opening.

When the performance in the Cave of Beasts was over, a second pair of sliding doors between it and the third were shot back, a second set of curtains drawn aside, and the audience invited to enter the Cave of Magic and Monsters.

There were no tumblers or learned pigs in the Cave of Beasts. The entertainment there consisted of the inspection of the beasts, a lecture of Catmur on the animals and winding up with the performance of Jeff Monday in the wild beasts' dens, his entry to the tiger's cage being always reserved for the last.

In the Cave of Beasts Catmur was not facetious. This was the educational branch of the establishment. This Cave appealed to the relatives and guardians of youth. A few anecdotes crept into the lecture, but the visitors were supposed to be principally engaged in improving their minds by looking at the collection of animals, congratulating themselves on the thickness of the bars between the animals and themselves, and dwelling in breathless anticipation on the moment when the lion-tamer, Jeff Monday, began his marvellous performance with the beasts.

At length, clad in black tights, with a tan-coloured leather strap at each wrist, and round his

head a black silk fillet, and in the centre of the fillet, upon his dusky forehead, a silver star, Jeff Monday bowed, swung himself quietly round on his heel without rising upright after his bow, and entered the leopards' cage.

CHAPTER X.

JEFF MONDAY AND THE TIGER.

JEFF MONDAY did not carry whip or wand. There was no room in his close-fitting tights for life preserver or revolver.

As he entered the cage the poor leopards came towards him with exuberant demonstrations of affection; but when they rubbed themselves against his legs, and fancied themselves too close to him to be any longer visible to him, they turned their muzzles away, as though their gorge rose at the bare thought of him for food, and yet while they held their heads away they gaped and gnashed their teeth and snapped, secretly desiring to be at his throat, to crush the limbs they affected to despise.

They fawned upon him because they feared him, because, although never violent with them, he filled them with dread of what they knew not, as the roar of the lion fills the forest with fear. He was their superior, their master by some power they

loathed and distrusted. They were the subject race, ever on the look-out for a flaw in his armour, that they might strike and be avenged and glut their ire. They were his slaves against their instinct, and by force of their nature they were traitors to him in heart. They caressed him with their heads in order to keep themselves from tearing him with their teeth and claws. They played with him so that they might be near him when a moment of weakness or inattention on his part should give them a chance of springing upon him and wounding him.

The leopards jumped through hoops and sprang through his arms set akimbo. They leaped over his back and stood upon his shoulders, and gave him their paw like a dog, and rubbed their heads against him to show their love for him, and growled and snapped at one another, to relieve their minds and prevent them jumping upon him and pulling him down and clawing his flesh from his bones.

In the lion's cage there was but a small African male, sombre and gloomy looking, wholly wanting in the friskiness and simulated affectionateness of the leopards.

When Jeff Monday entered the lion's den the brute was lying full length at the back. He rose sulkily, yawned, and shook himself, then came for-

ward sullenly with dropped ears and hanging head. After the yawn he made no other noise, but went through his performance inattentively, never seeming to know or to care what was going on or what he was expected to do, and trying all the time to avert his eyes from the man and seem to be unconscious of the trainer's presence.

"It's the lion will kill Jeff in the end," said a man in the audience, "not the tiger. It's the brute that never looks on you that turns on you. I ought to know. I had three years at it, and a lion like that went for me at last. That lion got my arm, he did." The speaker carried an empty sleeve across the breast of his coat. The man spoke to no one in particular. By his side was standing a man in a blue apron.

The performance with the lion consisted in making him jump through bigger hoops than those used with the leopards. He leaped over wooden bars placed by Jeff Monday at an angle between the side of the cage and the floor. On the smaller bills this was called, "Wonderful and exciting steeplechase with lions." After the steeplechase Jeff Monday clapped his hands with a loud noise and the lion fell down as if shot. The trainer raised the lion's head from the ground, but the lion showed no signs of life. On the smaller bills this was inscribed as the lion

shot—"Marvellous simulation of death of the lion." After this Jeff backed out of the cage and shut the door, and the lion curled up sulkily and with a snort went to sleep.

"Some day," said the man with the empty sleeve to the man in the blue apron, "that brute, instead of falling when he claps his hands, will down the tamer, and what would the tamer's life be worth if that brute ever got him down? It's all right with these lions and tigers so long as you keep on your feet. You see, when you're near them you seem very big to them, for they think you have a long body and another pair of legs behind, like themselves, and that's why you must always face them; they judge you by your front, and think you must be twice as big as themselves. But once they have you down they know what a fraud you are. No man a lion or a tiger once saw down under him had ever any power over him again."

"You've never been here before, neighbour?" said the man in the blue apron.

"No, never. But I ought to know something about the brutes—one of them gave me an empty sleeve."

"Ah," said the other, "that was bad. I'm sorry for you. But you never saw Jeff with the tiger?"

"No, never."

"Then, wait. Watch now. In he goes."

There was a low, deep sound among the crowd, as though all gathered breath at once.

The black figure of Jeff Monday bowed quickly to the audience. Before he slipped into the cage of Ben the tiger, who was said to have killed a keeper abroad, the audience noticed that Jeff Monday's right arm was bare from the wrist to the shoulder.

While the performance with the leopards and the lion was going on, the tiger had lain coiled up at the back of his cage, as far as he could get away from the bars. The moment he heard the door of his cage open he started up, turned round, and with a low, deep growl shook himself, rose, and with two undulating bounds, sprang upon the keeper.

The audience drew a hard, audible breath, like a gasp.

The huge brute raised himself on his hind-paws, and seized a shoulder of the man in each thick, soft, claw-armed forepaw.

A throb, as though one audible heart-beat of all the spectators, stirred the air. No one moved. No one spoke. No sense was exercised but the sense of seeing.

The huge striped beast swayed to and fro, the man swaying to and fro with him. The man tottered on his feet.

"If he falls," whispered the one-armed man, "he is a dead man."

"Wait," whispered the man in the blue apron.

Suddenly the tiger threw up his enormous, hideous head and curved his back inward.

"Ah!" whispered the man with the empty sleeve. "He will pull him down. He is a dead man."

"Wait."

Like a flash the tiger straightened his back and flung the lion-tamer back, still retaining his hold of the shoulders.

Jeff Monday struggled, and fell with the tiger on top.

A sound like a universal sob burst from the people.

The keeper was lying on his back close to the front bars of the cage, the tiger lying partly across the body.

The tiger took his left paw from the man's shoulder and placed it on the man's breast. Then with a growl he seized Jeff Monday's naked right arm and shook it and growled and mumbled and snarled over it.

A groan burst from the crowd.

As swiftly as he had seized the arm he dropped it; took his paw from the other shoulder, and thrusting the paw on the man's breast further and so that

the claws extended beyond the man's body and the fore-arm of the tiger rested gently on the man's chest, threw up his head, and opening his horrible mouth uttered a terrifying roar, and glared around fiercely at the people, lashing his tail with fury.

The air and attitude of the beast now was that of a tigress at bay crouching to defend her young.

"Well done, Ben! Well done, Jeff!" the people cheered, as the keeper rose unharmed and bowed in acknowledgment of the shouts of applause.

"I wouldn't do that for all the money in the Bank of England," said the one-armed man. "Some day that tiger will kill that man."

"That tiger will never harm that man," said the man with the apron. "I supply the meal for the beast. I have seen this performance a dozen times. That tiger loves that man better than ever a she-tiger loved her cubs. Look now."

Jeff Monday was sitting in the middle of the floor of the cage and with his face to the audience. The great, striped, undulating, lithe beast was walking round and round him, making a harsh, grating, purring sound, now and then thrusting his thick, shapeless, ferocious head against the man, now and then rubbing his lean, lank shoulder against the shoulder of the sitting keeper. Now and then he laid his deep wrinkled, creased head against the head

of the man, snoring and purring harshly the while. All at once the tiger stopped in his restless walk, and throwing up his head, glanced at the audience through the bars, fixing his terrible fiery eyes on the people for the first time.

Out of that prodigious head, all battered and marred, blazed two dark eyes. Across one, a red-hot iron had seared a gaping furrow. On the crown of the slanting head a bald, blackened patch told where a charge of shot, fired a foot off, and glancing upward, had torn away hair and skin, the powder blackening for ever the flesh now lying seared upon the bone. An upward lance thrust in the corner of the night owl gave the face at that side a horrifying and degrading leer.

The brute stood still, glaring at the people ferociously for a moment, then began walking up and down, lashing his tail and growling and gnashing his cruel yellow teeth.

Meanwhile, Jeff Monday never moved. He sat motionless on the middle of the floor, his club and naked arms folded across his breast, black and tawny twisted bars, his dusky, expressionless face set towards the spectators, the far-away look of the great forest beasts in his eyes.

"When that tiger goes back to him he'll kill Jeff Monday," whispered the man with the empty sleeve.

"I know their ways. The tiger is lashing himself into a fury for the attack."

"He'd kill all of us, no doubt, if he could get at us, but he'd die for Jeff," said the knacker.

The tiger stood in the middle of the bars and thrusting out his under jaw and opening his mouth, displaying his huge yellow fangs, uttered a roar that made the stoutest start back and the timid quail.

Then with a scornful toss of his head and contemptuous lash of his tail, for the creatures who, after all this defiance, would not come on, he dropped his head all at once, turned round, facing the keeper, flung himself heavily on the floor, and, wriggling along on his great, sinewy side, swept back to where Jeff Monday sat on the boards, and with a yawn dropped his gigantic head on the man's lap.

"Friend," said the one-armed man, "you are right. That tiger will never harm a hair of Jeff Monday's head. That tiger would die for that man, as you say. What's the secret?"

"I never saw the tiger show his love for Jeff so strong before," said the other, not heeding the question.

"What's the secret? There must be some secret."

"Look!" said the man with the apron. "The tiger's love has got the better of Jeff himself to-day. The tears are falling out of Jeff's eyes!"

"Why he loves the tiger better than a sweetheart!"

"Sweetheart!" cries the man in the blue apron scornfully, "Jeff has no sweetheart—wants no sweetheart. What sweetheart would give him such love as that tiger gives him? What woman would love only him as that tiger loves only him? And he loves only the tiger. What more love could man want than that? Look!"

Jeff Monday had raised the tiger's head in his hands and drawn it against his breast, and was regarding the hideous, battered, odious head with a look of such yearning and ineffable love that those who were near and saw it felt their eyes moisten and their throats swell.

"I tell you," said the man in the apron, "it's one thing to be loved by a woman that's of your own kind, and another to be loved like that by a beast that's against you by nature itself. Look at Jeff's face now. Doesn't he look more like an angel than a man? and then that tiger is more like an angel to Jeff than any man or woman. They may say this is a dangerous performance. It does me more good than anything else I know."

"It is wonderful while it lasts, but how long will it last?"

"You don't think now that the tiger will one day turn on Jeff?" asked the man scornfully.

"No. But there must be an end of it some way."

"You don't think," said the knacker, with withering irony, "that Jeff will turn on the tiger?"

The man shook his head. "He would kill himself before he would hurt that beast."

Within twenty-four hours the end predicted came; Jeff Monday had shot the tiger.

CHAPTER XI.

AT LANCASTER GATE.

Hugh Luxmore lived in Mr. Greyborne's house at Lancaster Gate. His duties were light and he could dispose of most of his day as he chose. Breakfast was at half-past eight, and from nine to ten the secretary was closeted with Mr. Greyborne over the ordinary correspondence of the morning, and general talk about the "Life." From that out Luxmore was free to allot his hours, the habit being for him to give three or four to the autobiography. From breakfast till dinner the two men did not meet. Mr. Greyborne usually went out, and the secretary went, till luncheon, to the room where the work was going on.

The old man was destitute of literary speech. He knew no more how to go about making a book than of composing an oratorio. His only view in connection with the book, was that it should be a plain, straightforward history of his career. He had undertaken it in obedience to the command of

D'Alligham, so that he might not, upon his retirement, find himself wholly adrift from occupation and with no interest in future wants.

"It will be wholesome for you to have the production of the book to think of. It is deadlier for a man who has been busy all his life to lie idle than for even a young man. To-day is a fatal position for a man who has no interest in to-morrow. To-day ought to be considered the waiting-room of time, as time ought to be considered the waiting-room of eternity."

The contractor felt no hurry about his book. He had no ambition to pose as an author. He had no intention of taking credit for labour not his own. He would say on the title page that the volume was edited by Hugh Luxmore from documents and facts supplied by him. He never for a moment imagined the book would interest the public, and he knew it would contain facts and hints useful to men engaged in big contracts.

Mr. Greyborne spent a good deal of his time at his club reading the papers, particularly those connected with his own occupation. Up to the time of his marriage he had been altogether absorbed in his business. After the loss of his wife and child he gave himself up more than ever to specifications and estimates, and plans and calculations. He had always kept to

the front of things in his own line, but for years he had been falling behind the world in general affairs, and now he was a self-absorbed, dreamy old man, requiring a good deal of working before he could be made to show interest in matters outside engineering and building. As the years went on he had gradually drawn back more and more into himself, until now few who met him got a glimpse of the real man at all. In ordinary affairs he was as simple as a child. In money matters he was more than liberal, lavish.

Although he and D'Alligham did not meet often they were sincere friends. In fact D'Alligham was the only intimate friend he had, the one man who knew him and his history thoroughly, and after the doctor, to whom he spoke with that absolute absence of reserve so startling and overwhelming in men who make few confidants, and to be found in them alone, the one person to whom he gave any confidence at all was his private secretary, Hugh Luxmore.

One of the uses of the projected autobiography was that it enabled Mr. Luxmore to look forward to dinner with pleasure. It was then the two men spoke about the book.

During dinner that Wednesday evening Hugh Luxmore did not feel at his ease. According to his conscience he was not engaged in any scheme of

which he ought to be ashamed. But it was one thing to arrange beforehand all the moves of his game, and another thing to sit in this man's dining-room, receiving his hospitality and his confidence whilst—well, moving on lines not visible to his employer and his host.

Mr. Greyborne was a short, stout, fresh-coloured man, with close-cropped iron-grey hair and clean-shaven face. Every day after dinner he drank two glasses of port and smoked a couple of cigars. Hugh Luxmore drank a glass of claret and smoked cigarettes.

When the two were left alone that Wednesday evening there was some desultory talk about current events, and then some general talk about the book.

Luxmore found it necessary to clear his throat several times before he could bring himself to approach the matter foremost in his mind. At last he plunged on.

"I have now, sir," he said, "completed the section devoted to the melancholy incidents seventeen years ago. And before I touch on the resolution, under medical advice, of continuing in business, there seems an opportunity for you to make any remark you may think fit in connection with the dreadful occurrence. I, of course, bear in mind what you have

so often told me, that you do not wish to make this book a vehicle for sentiment."

Luxmore paused.

The old man took his cigar out of his mouth and looked steadily into the fire. "Quite right, Mr. Luxmore," he said gravely. "I do not desire to make the book a vehicle for sentiment."

"Putting sentiment aside," said the young man, knocking the ashes carefully off the end of his cigarette, "a line or two of reflection might not come amiss at the end of the section."

"Reflection?" said the contractor with more interest; "reflection of what kind?"

Luxmore cleared his throat and touched his lips with his glass. "Well, of course, sir, all the readers of the book will know how successful you have been in life—that you retired with a vast fortune——"

"It is my intention to give all figure-money, figures and all. I don't mean down to shillings and pence, you know; but in round numbers, round numbers. We shall say later in the book that I took with me out of business something more than a million." He sipped his port and replaced the cigar in his mouth. He was a man of no pretences, and he did not desire to conceal his self-complaisancy as he uttered the rolling, resounding word that expressed the sum of his fortune.

"What I was thinking of when I spoke of a reflection was that you might with great propriety and force say something about the fact of there being many thousands, hundreds of thousands of children born into poverty, who live and grow up in poverty, and die in poverty, and here was a child—an heiress—to whom all you possessed would naturally go, snatched out of life by a mere accident." Luxmore rested his elbow on the table, shaded his face with his hand and watched the old man keenly through his fingers.

Mr. Greyborne looked into the fire, smoking slowly. "I don't like the notion much," he said at length, in a thoughtful voice. "If we said that it would be the first thing of the kind in the book, wouldn't it?"

"Yes."

"I'd rather keep to facts and figures. I am at home in facts and figures. Facts and figures seem to me things you can state without feeling about them, as one would sell bolts and bricks. Facts and figures are your own to do with as you please. But when you go into such reflections, you seem to take others into partnership."

"If I may speak out," said Luxmore, shifting uneasily on his chair and looking into the fire also, "I think the point of the book at which we have now arrived would be a good place for you to indi-

cate, if you mean to indicate at all, the direction in which you would like to see your wealth flow, since that accident deprived you of an heiress."

"Oh, I understand now," said Mr. Greyborne, looking from the fire to the young man. "You think I ought now to say how I intend leaving the money."

"No, no," said Luxmore, meeting the contractor's glance with his own, "I do not presume to recommend anything of the kind." He put his hand in his pocket and took out a sheet of paper, saying with a laugh, "I have ventured to put down the outline of what I thought might come in just here. But I am afraid it is more than a reflection. I am afraid it is almost sentiment."

"Read," said Mr. Greyborne, finishing his port, lighting a fresh cigar and fixing his eyes sternly on the fire.

"You will not be offended if I seem to have presumed rather much," said Luxmore with a smile. "I was only trying to devise an effective ending to the section, and when I put down what I have here I never thought of submitting it to you. I just wrote it for my own satisfaction."

"Offended! How can I be offended? I am always glad to listen to a suggestion."

"'I found myself now,'" read the secretary from the paper before him, "'at the age of fifty, in full

health and vigour, possessing half a million of money, deprived of wife and child, and without a single relative to enjoy my success while I lived or inherit my fortune when I died. Now that my life has been prolonged many years and my fortune doubled, what would I not give to live one year in the society of my lost one!'"

The voice of the secretary ceased. Silence filled the room. The eyes of the old man were fixed upon the fire. The eyes of the young man were fixed on him.

Moment after moment went by without change. From abroad came the roll of carriage wheels. In the intense silence this dull rumble was exaggerated. In the secretary's ears it seemed as loud as the incessant rumble of wheels at Clayton Junction. A thought flashed into Luxmore's mind. He raised his eyes to the picture hanging over the fire-place, the picture of a beautiful, dark young woman looking down with large, mysterious eyes from the wall.

"The sibyl in the Cave of Magic," he whispered to himself. "If this old man could only see the sibyl at this moment in the Cave of Magic, what would happen?"

Luxmore dropped his eyes to the figure of the old man still staring into the fire. The attitude of the

dreamer was slightly changed. The old man's face was shaded from the young man by one of the hands.

"What would this man give now," thought Luxmore, "for one glance into that Cave of Magic and the outline I could give of Mildred Starr's history?"

At length Greyborne raised his eyes and looked at the picture over the chimney-piece.

"That passage must be changed," he said at last in a hushed, husky voice. "It must," he said. "I would give all I possess in the world and die happy if I could only live one day with either of my lost ones, with the wife I loved, Luxmore, in my lonely middle age, or with the daughter as she would be now, a companion and a hope. I would give all and die happy, Luxmore, for one day. I would give all my fortune for one day, Luxmore."

The old man had never called him "Luxmore" before. He had never before in the secretary's presence displayed emotion.

"Shall I alter the passage as you suggest, sir?"

"The passage! The passage!" said the old man with a start. "Oh, of course! I forgot you were speaking of the book. No, no. No passage of the kind must appear in the book."

The secretary thought, "I don't care about the

book. I have now found out all I want to know. The old man would give his life merely to see his child, whether he found her the wife of a beggar or a convict."

"You have set me thinking, Luxmore," Greyborne went on. "You have now been helping me for a year or more with this book, and you must know more of my affairs than anybody else, except D'Alligham. I have long ago decided what I shall do with the bulk of my fortune; but you may make your mind easy about your own future. I shall take care of that. I am a little upset to-night. Your words set me thinking of long ago, which does not after all seem so long ago. You know my wife used to sing, and I was learning her language. It is a fine, stately language, and my heart always felt stately towards her, Luxmore, clumsy as I may seem to you. She used to sing to me in the evenings—a beautiful, wonderful voice."

"A rich contralto?" asked Luxmore eagerly.

"Yes; but how did you guess? I never spoke of it to you before."

"No," said Luxmore, confused a little. "But I always connect Mrs. Greyborne's style of romantic beauty with a deep voice." He was thinking of the "beautiful, wonderful" contralto voice he had heard in the Cave of Magic from the lips of Mildred Starr,

whose portrait that one over the mantel-piece might be.

"I'd give all I have," said the old man, "for one hour, one look. Good-night." He rose and left the room with shuffling feet and bowed head.

Thought Luxmore, "He would leave all he has to that daughter if she was the wife of a beggar or a convict. But how would it be if she was the wife of a—traitor?"

CHAPTER XII.

THE TIGER AT LARGE.

LUXMORE did not sleep well that night. As a rule he felt perfectly satisfied with himself. He was not now discontented with himself, but he was not perfectly contented. He resisted a desire to justify himself, for self-justification was, he knew, the sign of a weak cause.

He asked Hugh Luxmore, as though the question had nothing to do with himself, if it would not be almost better to lay the whole case before Mr. Greyborne and trust to his chance of the old man rewarding him with his daughter's hand? As an impartial judge Hugh Luxmore told himself that would be a desperate risk to run.

Mr. Greyborne's statement that his secretary would be provided for by will was not one he looked for or desired. He knew how secretaries were provided for in wills. He should find himself with a thousand pounds, a silver inkstand and a hundred

and fifty or perhaps two hundred a year. That might satisfy a man of sixty, who wished to take his ease, but for an ambitious young man it would be less than useless; indeed, it would be almost an affront. Yes, the best way to look upon that promise of consideration as a servant deserving a pension would be to consider it as an insult. Why should Mr. Greyborne assume he wanted alms?

But the secretary could not get up much indignation over the promised legacy. He was not sensitive by nature, and he had much more important things to think of than Mr. Greyborne's intentions towards him while they stood to one another in their present relations.

No, the best thing for Hugh Luxmore to do was to make sure. He had no doubt whatever that with Catmur's help he could win. He had not the shadow of a doubt that Mildred Starr of Catmur's show was really Inez Greyborne, and that Catmur and the portraits and the documents left by Catmur's dead wife would fully establish the girl's identity in the eyes of Mr. Greyborne. The only difficulty of any moment he saw in the matter was with the girl herself. He could not believe she cared for that dark-skinned, middle-aged lion-tamer. And yet if all he had heard of the isolation in which Catmur had kept her was true, this grotesque man

with the absurd name was the only man the girl had a chance of meeting. Jeff Monday was the only man who ever went inside the door of Catmur's house, and it was impossible to say how the imagination of a lonely young girl might have been affected by contact with this swarthy lion-tamer whom the audience regarded as a most daring hero.

There was, of course, no use in Catmur wasting any more time over that absurd proposal that he should take Jeff Monday's place in the show. What had been Catmur's object in making such an absurd suggestion he could not fathom. He had offered Catmur twenty thousand pounds for his co-operation. One would fancy that sum enough to induce the showman to send Jeff Monday about his business. Catmur could not think of giving the daughter of the rich John Greyborne to a saltimbanco, a clown, a creature who, according to Catmur himself, owed his very power over the beast to a trick, a drug. The idea was monstrous—outrageous! not to be listened to with patience, and Hugh Luxmore would not listen to any more of it. This was no time for trifling. This was no matter for trifling with. To-morrow Catmur should come straight up to strict business.

When the morrow came it was not propitious. The clouds overhead hung even lower than yester-

day. The air was heavier and more misty. Before ten o'clock a damp, streaky fog drifted over London from its brooding place in the Essex marshes.

The fog was not dense enough to stop the traffic or keep indoors people who wanted to be abroad. Across a wide street it blurred the line of doors and windows, but left the larger surfaces visible. It was cold and wet and wretched without rain—a day to depress the spirits of those who had time to think of their spirits—not bad enough to stop the business of people moderately anxious about their affairs.

Hugh Luxmore was more than moderately anxious about his affairs. He had been so long brooding over the scheme now coming to a head, that he was in a state of great perturbation when he found himself about to move in it. Mr. Greyborne made no reference to their conversation of the night before. The secretary was glad of this. He had gathered from the scene of last night that no serious obstruction to comfortable relations between Millie's father and Millie's husband would be raised by the millionaire. Until the scheme had advanced beyond the present step, Luxmore would prefer saying no more about the past to Greyborne.

At a quarter past eleven Luxmore was to be with Catmur.

He drove in a hansom from Lancaster Gate to Victoria Station, where he took train to Clayton Junction. He did not drive the whole way from Lancaster Gate to Railway Avenue, although that would be the quickest way, for he did not wish the cabman to know whither he was going. He had never once mentioned the Caves to Mr. Greyborne, and it would be much safer not to leave behind him a clue to his destination, for, although nothing in the world could be more unlikely than that Mr. Greyborne should seek to follow him, still one can never be too cautious when caution at all is desirable.

He was not conscious of being in either good or bad spirits. His nature was one of those almost free from fluctuations of spirits, for his mind was always fixed on the necessity for success, and a man who is always thinking of success must be always alive and alert to use his faculties and opportunities to the best advantage. No man whose state of mind is always one of preparedness can have good or bad spirits: he is jubilant or discomfited or absorbed, but rarely in good or bad spirits.

Luxmore was absorbed and confident. Catmur could not possibly get from anyone else a better offer than he had made, and as far as another ten thousand pounds went, why, Catmur could have it if he wanted it.

What was twenty thousand pounds out of a million? Nothing.

Fancy a million! A million all his! Why, he should go into Parliament. The doors of Parliament had always been open to any man with a quarter of a million who chose to knock long enough and persistently enough. If a man who owned a million once got into Parliament and minded his opportunity, nothing could keep him out of a peerage!

The best of it was, nothing whatever in the case formed a serious drawback. The money had been fairly earned in a highly respectable business. Mr. Greyborne's name had never been touched in the faintest way by the breath of commercial scandal, and from what he had heard in Spain Mrs. Greyborne's family added dignity to the money of rich John Greyborne.

Of course, when Millie was his wife and the acknowledged heiress or in possession of the wealth of John Greyborne, it would not be pleasant to repeat that she had been the clairvoyante of Catmur's show. But that would lose the sting soon; and had not some of the richest and proudest peers of Europe married actresses? Pooh! there was nothing at all in that.

Imagine him, Hugh Luxmore, the pauper orphan, the nephew of the bankrupt John Luxmore, inheritor

of a million! Member of Parliament! Peer! Was ever such a career as his should be? And this was not the dreaming of a romantic boy, but the reasonable—fancy that!—the *reasonable* expectations of a level-headed man of eight-and-twenty!

If this Catmur only fell into his views, nothing that was not quite certain was more likely than that all the success desired would befall him. John Greyborne had the money, no doubt, but what use was it to him? Wealth had come to John Greyborne too late in life to make any use of it. The contractor was not a clever man outside contracts. His outlook was too limited. He knew the saying that fools made money for their sons to spend it. But if in the present case the contractor made money he could not convert that money into success, into distinction, into glory. Another saying was, that it took three generations to make a gentleman. This might be true in an ordinary case; but in this case, here was the money coming from the first hand that made it into the hand of one who could get a peerage with it.

A good education had put the tools into his hands for working his way up socially. All he needed was the material to work with, and John Greyborne's money was the very material needed.

Look at the steps again: son-in-law of a millionaire, member of parliament, himself the millionaire,

baronet, peer. Why, the career would be more wonderful than that of the young Ben Disraeli. It was certain Hugh Luxmore would never be prime minister of England. He knew himself he had not the abilities to climb to such a giddy height. He had no ambition to lead men. All he desired was to be rich and gloriously conspicuous, and he could not fail to be both if he could only marry this girl.

And, of course, the girl herself was the most beautiful being he had ever seen, and he would treat her as the first lady in the land and love her as well as any other man, better, he had no doubt, than many a man who would profess to love her for her beauty alone. Disraeli himself said that all the men he knew who married for love either beat their wives or were living separated from them. When men allowed themselves to choose their wives because of pretty faces or arts and accomplishments, they were certain to use their hands when the charm lost the edge of novelty. But if a man took a wife in sober and solid earnest and because of considerations which admitted of no abatement with time, then he was doing the wisest thing towards which human wisdom could help him in the choice of a helpmate.

"This is the back entrance," said Hugh Luxmore to himself, interrupting the current of his thoughts.

"I hardly knew it in the fog. Why, I cannot see across the Flat. I cannot see even Catmur's house that's half-way across the waste ground. The fog is a good omen, or rather handsel, of success, for no one could follow me through that fog. Even if any one had come by train from Victoria, no one could have kept me in view across this deserted stretch. Here is Catmur waiting for me. Now to be brief and firm with him."

"Well," said Catmur, hoarsely, without looking Luxmore in the face, "have you made up your mind about taking Jeff's place?"

"Oh, fully," answered Luxmore, with a laugh.

The laugh seemed to sting Catmur. "All right," said he, "you are quite sure?" He led the way into the deserted Cave of Monsters.

"Perfectly certain. The idea is grotesquely preposterous."

"All right," said Catmur again, more huskily still.

They had now reached the curtains over the sliding door.

"We must only," said Catmur, "manage the best way we can. I—I am very busy. Will you step inside for a few minutes? I'll be with you soon. I want to see about something before we talk this out."

Luxmore passed between the sliding doors, which were swiftly drawn together behind him with a loud clang.

He turned around, facing the door, with a start, then faced the open door of the menagerie.

On the centre of the floor, close to the table, lay the tiger at large.

The ferocious brute stared at the intruder with insolent indifference for a moment, then rose and growled, then crouched down as though afraid to make the least noise.

He was crouching for the spring.

Luxmore stood limp and paralysed with horror, staring at the brute.

The muzzle of the brute rested on his forepaws. His eyes, no longer with that far-away look in them, pierced, transfixed the victim.

Suddenly a terrific shriek seemed to pass through the brute from muzzle to tail, and, as though shot from some prodigious catapult, he flashed through the air with a terrific roar.

The yell of a man in his death-agony pierced the air.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BEASTS' FRIEND.

The impassiveness of Jeff Monday's swarthy face had in it the sweetness of the blind. He held his head high, not because he scorned earth, but because his head was lifted unawares by the nearness of his spirit to Heaven. He wanted nothing but love, and he had found no love in the thirty-four years of his life but the love of Bengal the tiger.

He had never known father or mother. Gipsies had found him, a helpless baby by the roadside, and with gipsies he had lived awhile. Before he had reached the years of adolescence, he had thought more of life than many a grey-haired patriarch who has gone through all life's changes and experiences.

Jeff Smith, gipsy, had been picked up in his swaddling clothes on a Monday, and Jeff Monday he was named by the nomad family with whom he lived for twenty years. His skin was dark, but not apple russet like theirs. It could not be expressed

in any terms of red and brown. There was no red in his cheeks or lips or in the tone of his flesh. A painter might have described it as the grey of yellow-black in a dead light.

His chin projected so as in profile to suggest negro blood, but seen in front this seeming vanished, for the lips, although of the same hue as the face, were close, and firm, and sweet, with human gentleness. When closed they looked as though about to smile, and no child or brute ever feared him or avoided him, though men and women called him ugly.

One of the strangest things about Jeff Monday's face was the relations between the expression of the mouth and the eyes. The eyes were what made people look at him twice. They were dark and large and luminous. They had the far-away look of the eyes of the great forest beasts—that far-away look which is never firm, never tender, never thoughtful, never anxious. It is not the look of contemplation, but of solemn, rapt indifference to what is near, of weary yet inexhaustible attention to something afar off that interested one, when things were different, in another state. It appeared as if the lips of the lion-tamer would smile, when duty relieved him of gazing on spectacles outside the beholder's sympathy and beyond the beholder's ken.

In the ample and many-folded thoughts of his youth, Jeff Monday settled one thing about himself —no woman would ever love him.

The handsome gipsies of Jeff Smith's family told Jeff Monday he was hideous, and he took their word for it. His ugliness was as much a matter of certainty to him as the delicate smallness of his hands, at which they laughed, calling him lady-glove, or lily fingers, though the colour of the hands was no better than grey yellow-black in a dead light.

The foreheads of the gipsies were smooth, if shallow, his was rough and rugged; their noses were aquiline and cunning, his was shapeless, snub; their chins were shapely, if weak, his was square and prominent. He could have seen for himself, if he had looked inquiringly, but he took their words for it, and made up his mind woman's love was not for him. The fortune-tellers of the family set all store by beauty. He had taken in with earliest knowledge of speech that men loved beauty in women, and women worshipped comeliness in men, and that without good looks no man could win woman save by gold, and gold could not buy love. So he knew he should never win the love of woman.

Then he thought of man, but he found no love of man for man in the gipsy tents, but hate and

jealousy and rancour instead. It had seemed to him that woman might be tamed to love by a man possessing the will and good looks, but that man was a savage, full of covetous, and ungenerous, and predatory, and selfish thoughts, who never could be tamed.

Then he turned to brutes. Dogs, it seemed to him, gave love for love, full measure and running over, and horses stretched out their necks to those who came to them full-handed with only gentleness, and asses.

"If," he thought, you could only get it into an ass's head that you loved him, he would die for you. But his race has so long browsed on thistles and nettles in a land paved with unkindness that the poor brute has lost the power of faith in man."

When Jeff Monday was twenty he began his experience of beasts of foreign origin in a travelling menagerie. Here he gave all his time and attention to the beasts, watching over them and attending to them not as though he expected anything from them, but waiting upon them in the hope that they would want him and rely on him. In time, to his great astonishment, the owner of the menagerie told him he ought to undertake the larger beasts, and he became a lion-tamer on the bills of the show, which

simply meant that the larger carnivora had come to look on him as a being who would do them no more harm than a friendly one of their own species.

His theory was that it was with all beasts—hyenas, jaguars, pumas and foxes—as with asses, only differing in degree. Man had succeeded in reducing the wild zebra, the untamable zebra, to the stolid, hopeless, stupid ass. The zebra had first been fierce after its kind, resenting captivity as a white man resents slavery, and now was stupid by reason of long slavery and centuries of brutal cruelty. Hyenas, pumas, jaguars and foxes were now in the fiercer stage, simply resenting captivity. If while you held them captive you could persuade them you meant them no further harm, they would become as tame as cows or horses. It had taken centuries to tame the wildcat, that most ferocious of all wild beasts. Why should not centuries of good treatment and gentleness bring up the ravening tiger to the docility of the elephant?

Two years ago he had come across Bengal, the ferocious tiger who was said to have eaten a keeper who entered his cage in Amsterdam. Two years ago the owner of a travelling menagerie had bought Bengal, and Jeff Monday gave up every other thought to that of convincing this hideous brute that he was a friend.

Day and night he devoted himself to the beast, until the brute had grown as tolerant of him as of the indestructible bars of his cage.

Day and night he waited on that beast as a mother hangs round the couch of an ailing child.

Day and night he lavished thought on that brute as an enamoured poet lavishes thought upon his mistress.

Day or night he never passed that cage without speaking kind words to the beast and caressing it when Ben lay near the bars, though now and then the beast would claw or snap at him.

"I shall win," thought Jeff—"I shall win in the end. He *must*—he shall know I am his friend and would not harm him, would do him any good in my power."

One day at feeding time the great voracious, greedy beast seized a huge, awkward piece of bone and got it fixed firmly upright in his mouth, one of his great yellow fangs passing through the shaft of the bone. The tiger became frantic. All his efforts to dislodge the piece failed. He growled and snorted and tossed round.

Since Ben had come to England no one had dared to enter his cage. All shrank back from the task of trying to relieve the beast. It was certain death to go near him. Dangerous as he was at ordinary

times, he was ten thousand times more dangerous now. He would kill anyone who approached him. If he did not get relief in an hour he would kill himself.

Chloroform was suggested, tried and failed.

At length, in one of the intervals between the brute's paroxysms of fury, Jeff Monday declared he would go in and try what he could do. All protested against the risk.

"You'll never come out alive," said the other men.

Even the proprietor, who had paid three hundred and fifty pounds for the tiger, tried to dissuade Jeff, but he persevered. "I can die but once," he said. "I have no one in the world looking to me for anything, no one my death would hurt. I am bound one day or another to come to my end by one of them. If it is to be now, let it be."

When he entered the cage the tiger's quiet spell seemed coming to an end. He had already begun to growl and lash his tail and rub his huge gaping jaws with his terrible paws.

As soon as he saw Jeff enter he raised his misshapen, seared, battered head and roared. Without flinching Jeff stepped up to him, and seized the bone in his hands, and putting his knee on the tiger's neck as boldly as if the brute were a horse,

tugged and tugged until the bone came away suddenly.

With the force of the released strain Jeff fell back. The tiger snapped his jaw, lashed his tail and with a snarl put his huge paw on the chest of the prostrate man. Suddenly, before the red-hot irons could be thrust in, the tiger growled, drew back his paw, and rising and dropping his head, began rubbing his jaw against the prostrate man.

"Don't burn him," said Jeff quietly.

The red-hot bar was withdrawn.

Jeff rose.

The tiger rubbed his shoulder against him and knocked him down.

Again the tiger seized the man's chest with his cruel claws. Again Jeff said, "Don't burn him." Again the brute withdrew his paw. Again Jeff rose, and this time made his way out of the cage with no hurt beyond a shaking and a few scratches.

The next time Jeff passed outside the bars the tiger rose and accompanied him gravely, rubbing his hideous head against the bars.

From that hour the two were friends.

"I loved him from the first," thought Jeff, "because he is so ugly. No one else would ever love him. Women shrink from him as they shrink from me. He and I were intended to be friends. They

call me a lion-tamer. I call myself the beasts' friend. I always said it was in the heart of every beast to love a man who showed the beast only love. Now, some day the tiger will turn on me and kill me. What matter? He is the only living thing that loves me. I'll love him as long as I have the breath of life in my body, and when he presses it out of me it will be time for me to go."

CHAPTER XIV.

CATMUR IN THE CAVE OF MAGIC.

When Catmur slammed and fastened the two sliding-doors between the Cave of Beasts and the Cave of Monsters, he had intended rushing out through the open door at the back, and flying, he knew not whither, until all was over. He would keep away half an hour—an hour—and then come back to see how matters had gone on. The horrible discovery would, of course, burst on him as a thing wholly unexpected; and then, after a while, he would remember that Luxmore had let fall some preposterous words about rivalling Jeff Monday in influence over the tiger, with a view to propitiating the good opinion of Miss Starr, with whom the unfortunate young man had fallen hopelessly in love.

But no sooner had the great sliding-doors clanged, and the fatal hasp been secured, than Catmur, who had never flinched before, was seized by a paralysing dread. All at once his nerve, which had never before failed, deserted him. He looked around him

frantically for a means of escape, not from the place he was in, but from the thing he had done.

His knees trembled under him. He could no more run across Clayton Flat than lift the gloomy vault in which he felt imprisoned and crushed.

In his day he had done many daring and dangerous things outside the law, but this was his first act of murder; and now that it was accomplished all the force and courage of his nature deserted him.

He knew he was no stronger than a child.

With a horrible dread he dreaded that his mind would give way, and presently he would become a jabbering idiot, like his sister, only that he would be able to recall and describe events of the awful moments immediately preceding and following the hour at which his reason was taken from him.

He staggered to a couch on which one of the monsters reclined during the exhibition, and flung himself, face down, at full length upon it.

He put his fingers over his eyes and thrust his thumbs into his ears until his brain throbbed and beat so fiercely as to exclude the possibility of another sound reaching him, until the blood trickled slowly, drop by drop, from around the short, red thumbs.

He could hear nothing. A train passed over-

head. The vibration reached him, and the beating of the pulse came with a burr added to it. That was all the difference.

He set himself deliberately to count. This was partly to take his thoughts off the distracting idea of losing his reason, partly to enable him to measure time.

He counted a hundred beats of his pulse. If the tiger had attacked at once, this unfortunate young man was now beyond the power of doing harm.

Two hundred beats.

Even if the tiger had been slow to attack, all must now be over.

Nothing could save Luxmore. Once that brute touched the man, the life of the man might be measured by fewer seconds than had passed since he had counted two hundred.

Four hundred. All was quiet on the floor inside but the rapacious beast. What an awful spectacle was there! No, no! He must not think of *that!* To think of that hideous, palpitating mass was the surest way of all to insanity.

Five hundred. How long would it be necessary to remain thus? To lie here waiting for something to happen?

Waiting for what to happen?

What could happen? What was likely to happen? The thing which he had planned was done.

Did a brute in a case of this kind tear off the clothes, or would the head and neck—ugh! he must not think of it. He was not compelled to think of it. He was not fit to think of it.

Waiting! What was he waiting for? Was it not time to raise the neighbourhood? To burst howling through the front door in Railway Avenue and shout for aid, and shriek with horror, and curse the fool and the merciless beast.

He knew by rote the story he should tell—that is, if his mind did not give way:—On coming to the show from his home on Clayton Flat he found all right in the Cave of Monsters, but on entering the Cave of Beasts, to his horror he discovered the tiger's cage open, the tiger at large, and the unfortunate young man dead and horribly mangled.

(He wondered was the body of Luxmore horribly mangled?) How did it look? Was the head—ugh!

Stop! He had not thought of everything. He had forgotten to supply the means of Luxmore's entrance to the show. How could he account for the young man's presence in the menagerie? How did Luxmore get in?

It was exasperating—one could not think of every

thing—could not anticipate everything, on an occasion of such vital importance as the present.

Suppose even now, at this moment, the people were clamouring for an explanation. Suppose at this instant he was called upon to say how the young man had penetrated to the middle hall, what should he say? How strange one could not think of everything on an occasion like this! How distracting!

He had given up counting. Bah! what a childish, foolish expedient that counting had been! What idiocy for him to occupy time in dulling his mind with a senseless and mumbling string of numbers, when his very life might depend upon explaining in a reasonable way Luxmore's presence in the Cave! Already his brain must be injured in a great degree, when he could be guilty of such suicidal folly.

How could he account for Luxmore getting into the show? This was now for him a question of life and death, and he had been for several minutes trying to waste, absolutely to waste, time.

He, who had been thinking of bursting into Railway Avenue and alarming the neighbourhood, had prepared no way of showing how the miserable victim came to be near the brute!

Bursting into Railway Avenue! Why, here was more of his amazing stupidity! How was *he* after

opening the cage for the tiger and lighting the wet straw to get the brute out, and letting this young man into the Cave where the brute prowled about at large, to pass through that Cave of Beasts with the deadly creature free, and the still more deadly, inert, torn, bleeding mass lying on the crimson patch in the sawdust?

Mad! Mad! He was mad! Mad already! He had devised this young man's destruction in order that he might come by old Greyborne's money, and here was he now at the very first step of the terrible way stricken down by a physical weakness for which he was wholly unprepared, and his whole plan, his very life, menaced by the break-down of his intellect! What good was his plot? What good would the money be to him, if his reason was destroyed?

His very life was menaced! Ay, and by the hangman, too.

He wondered had the tiger torn off the—— Ugh! how that question haunted him! Not a question put in words, but worse, a question put in an incomplete picture. He could see in his mind's eye all that had gone on in the menagerie since he slammed the doors, but he could not see, he did not want to see, the head and neck of the victim, and yet he was always on the point of seeing the head and neck—or was it where the head and neck had been?

What should he do? What should he do? What should he do?

Already he had made two terrible miscalculations; he had not thought of affording a reasonable means of entry for Luxmore to the menagerie, and he had not taken into account the impossibility of his own passing through the menagerie to Railway Avenue while the tiger was at large—after the tiger had done his work—while the hideous and mangled remains were——

Ugh! There was that awful pictorial question again stopping short at the shoulders. He could see all the prostrate body, but at the shoulders the picture stopped short. Beyond the shoulders hung a veil. He could put aside that veil if he liked. He would not do so for all the gold that ever glittered. His terrifying thought was that some unseen hand, the hand of Retribution, would pull that veil back, and that when he saw beyond he would burst into maniac laughter, dash among people and scream out a history of the past hour.

Hour! Was it an hour? Could it be an hour since he had shaken that young man's hand—shaken his hand? The hands were bare! Had the tiger—were the hands gone——

Merciful Heaven! Now the veil was rent, and he saw beyond the shoulders at last!

In the picture he saw the body maimed and torn and mangled, the hands missing, from the headless trunk a stream of blood gushed out upon the ground! Standing over the prostrate form an enormous, odious tiger leered at him as he lapped the blood!

With a yell Catmur sprung from the couch on which he had been lying. He was weak and trembling.

He glanced around in abject terror. He dreaded to find the place full of people. In the brief moment of springing up he imagined he should find himself the centre of a throng of men holding out towards him threatening, denouncing hands. Over the heads of the crowd, he in fancy saw the helmets of the police. Behind the crowd and the helmets he pictured a hangman with a rope standing waiting for him under a gibbet.

At first he was dazed and could not see. The place was almost in total darkness. The long-continued pressure of his fingers on his eyeballs made his sight uncertain, phantasmagoric. He found difficulty in believing he was in the Cave of Monsters, difficulty in making out the familiar objects.

It was yet hard to believe he was alone. What! had no one up to this discovered the tiger had killed this young man? That was incredible!

Now he could make out more clearly where he stood. Now he could see where the larger familiar objects lay, the divans or couches on which the monsters sat, the chairs and tables, the cabinets of curiosities, the daïs at the back where Millie performed close to a door at the back opening on the Flat.

How dull the day was outside! The fog must have thickened. He had no wish to see that other door, the door opening into the menagerie, into the death chamber. And yet, though he paid his life for it, he must look.

He put his hand over his face, closed his eyes and turned slowly round. He trembled all over; his knees smote together. He could hardly stand.

Swiftly he took away his hand, opened his eyes and looked.

With a groan he fell to the ground.

The sliding-doors were flung fully back. The whole floor of the menagerie was plainly visible to him under the better light from the skylights. The ground of the menagerie was on a level with his eyes.

What he saw was worse than the worst his excited fancy had pictured.

He saw the long, wide expanse of sawdust-covered floor. He saw the legs of the small stand in the

drawer of which was kept the tiger's knife, the legs of the chairs, nothing more. This Nothing was in some awful way worse than the worst something he had been prepared for.

He crawled forward to the doorway of the Cave of Beasts and looked in.

The door of the tiger's cave was closed, the long, striped back of the tiger was visible through the bars. There was no trace of any human being in the place, no gory fragments, no torn clothes, only just by the door a pool of fresh blood.

CHAPTER XV.

MILLIE STARR.

THE cold sweat broke out on Catmur's mottled forehead and dropped into the sawdust on which he crouched.

What had happened?

How came it that the tiger was back in his cage, the cage door shut and bolted and the—the body not here? Who opened the doors of the Cave of Beasts? What had been found when the sliding-doors were shut back?

Were the police already on his track?

It could not be the police were on his track, for no living human being knew, or ever could know, what had occurred in this place between Luxmore and himself to-day.

How came the doors rolled back, the tiger in his cage and the body carried away?

Whoever did all this must have passed close by him as he lay on that couch. How was it they did

not rouse him? did not touch him? did not arrest him?

Oh, he had forgotten. Of course, the Cave of Monsters was quite dark, and his figure recumbent on the couch at the side would be absolutely invisible. His plugged ears prevented him from hearing anything, from hearing anyone come in, from hearing the doors rolled back, from hearing them carry away the dead.

Yes, but who had opened the sliding-doors, and got the tiger back to his cage and carried away—the body, the dreadful headless and handless trunk which had lain in that awful red pool?

Catmur rose slowly and painfully to his feet. He felt the ground beneath him was not firm, and might give away at any moment, at any point. His nerves were so shattered he could not rely on any of his limbs or muscles, or any of his senses: anything, everything might fail him and precipitate him headlong into an unseen abyss.

No matter what had happened, it would not be advisable for him to be found here just now. He was not in a condition of mind or body to speak or act. He should betray or commit himself.

He would take one more careful look around and go.

At that moment a figure was rapidly approach-

ing his back though the dense darkness of the Cave of Monsters.

Catmur, in the act of turning round to hasten away, to his horror heard a voice in the darkness behind him say:

"Oh, he is dead!"

With a shriek Catmur sprang round. He could not see. He was blinded for a moment, partly by the darkness and partly by terror caused by this voice coming unawares from the blind, cavernous depths behind him.

"Millie, is that you? You terrified me," moaned Catmur, as a tall, dark girl stepped out of the gloom of the arch into the better light of the menagerie.

"Oh, he is dead!" the girl cried, wringing her hands and standing on the threshold looking into the menagerie.

Catmur, possessed by a new terror, turned and glanced once more at the ground of the menagerie.

Did some affection of the brain prevent his seeing things visible to other people? Could Millie see stretched on the ground the body of Hugh Luxmore? Was the body, the awful headless and handless body, weltering in its gore, invisible to him a few feet off? He could see nothing on the ground. What did she mean by crying out when she looked at nothing, "Oh, he is dead"?

"Dead!" he cried aloud, in an agony of terror. "Who is dead, girl? What do you see?"

"Look!" she cried, pointing to the red pool.

"I see no one dead. I see only blood." He trembled so that he was in danger of falling again.

"But look," she pointed. "He does not stir. He is dead. Can't you see he is dead?"

Catmur followed with his eyes the direction of her hand. "What do you mean? Are you too mad? Cannot you speak? Who is dead? You are pointing at the cage. Who is dead! I say?"

"Ben the tiger. Jeff shot him dead. Look, he does not stir."

Suddenly Catmur became calmer. He took one long, sharp look at the tiger in the cage. He crept cautiously across the sawdust to the bars of the tiger's cage.

He pulled out a handspike from between two of the vans and thrust the handspike between the bars and pushed it against the tiger's back.

The girl moved across the threshold and approached the tiger's cage. As she came into the better light her surprising, exquisite dark beauty was revealed. Her large, marvellously mysterious eyes were now suffused with tears; her face was now long and wan and sad, but the beauty of it was

indestructible, the beauty of it seemed to light and to subdue the place.

The tiger did not stir. Catmur threw down the handspike, and going to the end of the van opened the cage.

Never before had that long, striped side lain motionless when the bars of that door rang and grated.

Catmur entered the cage and approached the great brute warily. One lightning sweep of one of these terrible paws, armed with its hooked, sharp, resistless claws, would tear the vitals out of a man, and leave him an empty carcase, a dying, palpitating husk. One crunch of these curved, eager, yellow fangs and one wrest of that short, wrinkled neck would tear all the life glands and ducts out of a human throat. One clutch of a ferocious paw upon a human head would leave behind a raw and scalped skull.

But the tiger did not move a muscle. The eyes were glazed, the deep chest did not move, the nostrils did not quiver, the monarch of the jungle lay still and stark.

"He was shot from behind," said Catmur. "The bullet took him at the butt of the ear and came out through the forehead.

"From behind? Of course, from behind. Do you

think Jeff Monday could shoot the tiger in front, looking at him?" she asked indignantly.

"Why did Jeff shoot the tiger?" asked Catmur, backing out of the cage. Well as he knew the great tiger was dead, he durst not even now turn his back on the mighty beast. "Why did Jeff shoot him? I was not here."

"Jeff shot him because Ben had got loose and was killing a man who had got in here."

"A man who had got in here," said Catmur softly as he gained the floor. He thought, "a man who had got in here; is that all she knows? is that all Jeff knows?" He added aloud, "This is a bad affair. The tiger was worth three hundred and fifty pounds. Tell me all you know about the affair."

"I do not know much. I only know that the tiger is dead and that he will die." She covered her face with her hands and burst into hysterical sobs.

Catmur started back and stood gazing at the girl in profound amazement. She only knew that the tiger was dead and that *he* would die! How came she to be so much interested in the fact that Luxmore would die? It was plain from what she had said Luxmore was not yet dead. But he was in a bad way—dying. Had Luxmore strength enough to say anything that would incriminate him? Nothing was more unlikely than Luxmore could or would

say anything dangerously incriminatory, for all Luxmore could say was that he asked the young man to wait a moment for him in the place where they had met the day before, the only part of the show in which there was daylight, and that when the young man got in there the tiger, owing to some dreadful accident, was at large. It had happened over and over again in menageries that some of the beasts got free. Of course, if Luxmore was able to give an account of the occurrence, it would no longer be possible to relate the story of Luxmore wishing to rival Jeff Monday in Jeff's performance with the tiger. The thing was more awkward than if Luxmore had been killed outright. He could not ask the girl direct questions. Direct questions might betray him. He would like to ask how Jeff happened to be near at the critical moment, but that explanation had better be sought of Jeff himself. What did puzzle him was that the girl should show such an extraordinary interest in Luxmore, of whom she knew nothing whatever, and whom she had seen only as an ordinary visitor to the show. Said Catmur:

"The tiger is dead and he will die! Who will die? Who was the man Jeff saved?"

"I don't know," wept the girl.

"You don't know who the man is that Jeff saved,

and yet you are in this dreadful state about him."

"About *him!*" cried Millie, taking down her hands from her tear-stained face, and staring at the showman in astonishment. "The strange man is hurt," she said, "but I do not think he will die. I was not thinking of him."

Catmur looked at the beautiful, tear-stained face in amazement. Again the shattering thought came in upon him, was his mind giving way? He said: "What do you mean when you say *he* will die? Do you not mean the man the tiger attacked?"

"No."

"Then who do you mean?"

"Jeff, of course!" said the girl in astonishment.

"Jeff!" cried Catmur. "What do you mean? Has the tiger hurt Jeff Monday too?"

"I think the tiger has killed Jeff Monday," she said sadly.

"Eh?" yelled Catmur, springing up to her.

"By being killed by Jeff Monday."

"You are talking folly to drive me mad."

"Did Jeff care for anything in all the world but the tiger? Did he love anything else in all the world but the tiger?"

"No."

"And he killed the tiger," she said, looking in surprise at Catmur's want of perception.

"So you say."

"Then he will die. Do you think I would live if I killed my mother?"

"But your mother is a human being, and your mother, moreover," said Catmur angrily, "and not a savage beast, and it would be different."

"Yes, but a woman is not so strong as a man, and a man's love is stronger than a woman's. And now Jeff has nothing to love, and in the night he will think always of his killing the tiger, and it will kill him."

"Upon my word," cried Catmur scornfully, "I think you are half in love with that sick nigger, Jeff."

"I wish he were half in love with me," she said, bursting into tears, "if it would take his mind off what he has done this morning, for thinking of it always will kill him."

"Come, come, Millie, child, these are serious affairs that have happened to-day. Is the man who was hurt conscious?"

"Yes."

"Do you know where he is?"

"Jeff brought him home to our house."

"That is right," said Catmur, with a gasp of relief, "and no one else has been to our place?"

"No."

"Very good. Let us get back then at once. We need not put off the midday performance. No one outside ourselves and Jeff must know all about this. We can just say the tiger died—make up some story about Ben between this and opening time. Come."

CHAPTER XVI.

WHY JEFF MONDAY FIRED.

"UNCLE," said the girl to Catmur, as they were walking through the cold grey fog towards the house, "how did the tiger get loose?"

"I don't know. What does Jeff say! What did he tell you?"

"He said nothing. He would say nothing. All he told me is that he happened to be near the show and he heard Ben growling. He knew by the growl something was wrong. He got into the Cave of Beasts and found the tiger killing the man. He seized the rifle and fired, just in time to kill the tiger and save the man. That was all he would say. That was all, indeed, I think, he could say. I believe Jeff's mind is gone. He is in the parlour sitting staring and smiling—staring out of eyes that see nothing, as if he were looking at the tiger still, only looking at the tiger, where he must not expect a look back to him. Uncle, it is awful."

"And Jeff has only told you what you have told me?"

"That's all. I put mother to sit with the strange man and told him to send her for Jeff if he wanted anything. I sent Susan for a doctor, and I ran over to the show in the hope of finding you."

"And you found me just come back. What does this young man say?"

"He says he called on you about business of importance. That he came by appointment. That he had seen you yesterday on the same business. That you told him to go into the menagerie where you had met him yesterday, and that you said you would be back to him in a moment, and that you shut the door, and instantly the tiger sprang on him, and he remembers nothing more until Jeff Monday was carrying him on his shoulder across the Flat to the house."

"Yes, my dear, the young man is quite right. I have had a good many important things on my mind of late, and just as this young man called I remembered I had a letter in my pocket that must be posted at once at the Clayton Junction head office if it was to be in time; so I asked him to wait a few minutes while I went to the post. You see, I didn't know Jeff was near. If I had known Jeff was near I should have asked him to go to the post-office. I

was not in with the beasts to-day, until I went in with you just now. When I saw the blood and missed the young man, I knew something dreadful had happened. How came the flap shutters of the cage down? How was the body of the tiger got back to the cage?"

"Jeff carried Ben back and let down the side shutter before he carried the young man away."

"And, Millie, are you sure that neither Jeff nor the young man said any more to you than you have told me? Be careful, my child, for this young man may bring an action for damages against me, and it is important. I should know exactly, even down to the least thing, down to tiny little things that might never seem to you of consequence. Here is the house now. My dear Millie, try to think if Jeff or this young man gave any more particulars of the affair."

"No, uncle, I think not; nothing that I can remember, at all events."

Catmur heaved a deep sigh of relief as he entered his home. Perhaps no one, not even Jeff, suspected yet. It was treading on hot irons, wandering blindfold among staked pitfalls until he knew more. He had been obliged to invent a new story to fit in with the present posture of affairs. And he must say as little as ever he could until he was able to

fit the rest of the tale he had to tell into the tales Luxmore and Jeff would tell.

Catmur and Millie went to the parlour. They found Jeff sitting back in an easy-chair, with his hands in his pockets, staring out before him.

When he saw the showman he nodded. Catmur sat down and took off his hat.

Millie went up to the lion-tamer and put her hand sympathetically on his shoulder.

He did not look up. He took no notice of the girl's presence. His eyes were turned on Catmur.

"Have you seen him?" he asked of Catmur at length.

"The tiger? Yes."

"Have you shut up the flap door?"

"No."

"If there's to be an afternoon show to-day the flap door must be shut up before the people are let in," said Jeff in a low, constrained voice.

"I thought the people who liked him might like to see him—to see the last of him."

"No one shall see the tiger dead," said Jeff with enormous slowness and deliberation. "No one liked him or loved him but me. They would insult him."

"Very well, Jeff. Don't take on so bad. You see I lose something too. He was worth three hundred and fifty pounds to me."

"But I shot the tiger with that rifle there to save human life——"

Catmur raised his hand to silence Jeff, and looking at the girl, who still stood by the stricken man with her hand on his shoulder, motioned her away, saying, "Leave us, Millie, my dear, and when the doctor comes call me."

Jeff looked up at her, noticing her for the first time. "Yes, Millie," he said impatiently, "go away. We have business to talk about."

"What business have you to talk about," she said, "except forgetting your sorrow?"

"Leave us now, my child," said Catmur gently, "and call me when the doctor comes."

With clasped hands and bowed head and tearful eyes bent upon the ground the young girl glided out of the room.

Catmur got up and shut and locked the door. Then he came back to his chair, sat down, and, half closing his eyes, looked at Jeff Monday and said:

"Where were you when you fired?"

"In the doorway between the front Cave and the Beasts' Cave."

"How long had you been there?"

"A minute before I fired."

"Did you see the young man go in?"

"No. When he went in I was behind the curtains."

"What were you doing there then? Hiding?"

"Yes. Hiding."

"Tell me a little about it?" said Catmur, breathing hard and wiping his forehead.

"Yesterday I saw you rehearsing that play with this young man. You had no right to make the tiger growl by showing him that knife. I thought it must be a dangerous play that required that knife when a man's neck was bent under it. I had it in my mind an accident might occur."

"Well?"

"Well, I made up my mind to be about to-day at the same time——"

"You did not hear me make an appointment with him yesterday? You were not hiding when he and I were here yesterday?"

"No. I came to-day by chance. I thought there might be another rehearsal, and there wasn't. I was disappointed."

"Disappointed?"

"Yes, there was no rehearsal. There was the play itself—the tragedy itself."

Catmur opened his lips on his clenched teeth, drew in a breath noisily, and said:

"Go on."

"So I thought I'd look in rather early. I came in from Railway Avenue as I did so. I thought something was wrong, but I could not tell what. I knew all was not right with the tiger, but I could not think what was wrong. I must have opened the doors at my side as you opened the doors at yours. I heard the tiger spring and the man shriek. The rifle is always behind the curtains in the angle between the two Caves. I seized it and looked in. The tiger had him by the head, and in another second would have broken the man's neck. I got the butt of the tiger's lug on the sight and fired." Jeff paused and freed his collar gently at the throat.

"Ay," said Catmur hoarsely.

"The tiger rolled over without a sound. I carried the rifle in with me. I examined the man. He was stunned, I suppose, by having his head knocked against the door or the ground when the tiger sprang. I think his thigh is broken. I saw he was in no great danger. I carried the tiger back into the cage lest anyone coming in might—might touch, might *kick* my dead beast." Jeff had to pause a moment.

"I know."

"Then I carried the man here and put him to bed. He recovered his senses on the way back here.

I carried the man on my shoulder and the rifle in my hand. I don't think the man will die. I have put another cartridge in the rifle. I am thinking of putting that bullet through the butt of my own lug."

"Nonsense, Jeff."

"I have nothing—nothing in the world to live for now. I am glad I killed him—I am glad no one else killed him. I always thought he would kill me. I wish it had been that way, for now, Bart Catmur, I am alone."

"And you killed the tiger you loved so much, Jeff Monday, to save a man you never exchanged a word with."

"Never exchanged a word with!" cried Jeff, sitting up and staring at the other with eyes that for the first time seemed occupied with present objects. "Never exchanged a word with, Bart Catmur! Are you mad? What do you mean?"

"Are you mad? Did not you shoot your tiger to prevent his killing this man Luxmore?"

"To prevent his killing this man Luxmore!" cried Jeff in astonishment. "Why, that dandy Luxmore is not good enough meat for my tiger!"

"Then why, why did you fire?"

"To save human life."

"His life? The life of a man who was not good enough meat for your tiger?"

"No. To save your life. To save your neck from the hangman's rope, Bart Catmur."

There was a knock at the door and Millie's voice said, "Uncle, the doctor has come. Is he to go up?"

"No," said Catmur, rising hastily. "I want to see Mr. Luxmore first."

CHAPTER XVII.

IN THE SICK-ROOM.

Catmur unlocked the parlour door, and telling Millie to say he would be down with the doctor presently, dashed upstairs.

Luxmore had been carried by Jeff to Catmur's own room. He lay on the bed pale and blood-stained, with a look of terror and pain on his face.

"I cannot express to you," said Catmur, standing over the injured man, "my horror and regret at what has happened. I do not know how the beast got loose. When I came back from the post-office I nearly died of the fright when I heard all. Only my servant Jeff Monday shot the brute, Heaven knows what might have happened. I have only just got back here to the house. The beast cost me three hundred and fifty pounds. Need I say that I would rather lose ten times the money than that you should be so cruelly hurt?"

"How came you to fasten me in? I heard you hasp the door on the outside. Had you looked in you must have seen the brute." Luxmore spoke slowly and with difficulty, contorting his face horribly with pain.

"Those doors will not stay closed unless they are hasped. They are made to run back when the hasp is undone. I would to Heaven I had seen the brute, I would have gladly placed my body between you and him. If I left the door open when you went in, someone passing by might see you, and for your sake as well as my own I wished no one to be aware you had called on me to-day. I could not shut the back door opening on the Flat, as I had lost my key, and could not get in again if I once closed it. Oh, surely, surely, Luxmore, you cannot fancy I had any design, any notion that harm could come to you? What good could harming you do me? Did you not make me the offer of a prince?"

In the course of his professional career Catmur had often acted before, but never so well as now. His voice, manner and gestures were those of a heart-broken man. Tears flowed copiously from his eyes—tears of fear and intense self-pity. He felt the terrible grief of one who has committed crime—in vain.

"You told me yesterday I should face the brute.

I told you I would not. You seem not only to know what ought to be done by me, but to possess the power of prophecy in my affairs."

"He doubts me! As I live he doubts me!" cried Catmur, in a tone of insupportable woe and agonising grief at being suspected. "Doubts me who had arranged to-day to put everything he wanted in his hands! Oh, Luxmore, do not drive me mad. Do not drive me to use the same rifle that saved you. Only this moment Jeff had to wrench it out of my hand. Say you will believe me."

"I am very weak now and not fit to decide anything."

"I know that. Too bitterly I can see it. I have sent for the best surgical aid in the neighbourhood. Everything that skill and money can do to put you right at once shall be done. You will be up and about in no time, and Millie shall nurse you while you are here, and I'll do all I can for you with her. There will be no difficulty in that quarter, and you shall have any papers I have and the advantage of my own testimony. I know you won't leave me empty-handed. I know you won't go back on your word about the twenty thousand."

"If you do all you say, I shall be better than my word," said Luxmore, more influenced by Catmur's artistic stipulation for the twenty thousand than all

which had gone before. Indeed, these words gave weight and reality to Catmur's long speeches. It now appeared to Luxmore that Catmur's great desire to be considered innocent sprang from the dread of losing the promised reward. "If I recover and succeed, I shall make it forty thousand," said Luxmore, doubling the sum by way of paying an extra risk insurance rate on his life, now that his life was in Catmur's power, now that he found himself helpless under Catmur's roof.

Catmur caught the injured man's hand and shed tears over it. "You have the heart of a gentleman and the open hand of a prince. This accident will turn the people against the show, and my great attraction is gone with the tiger. The affair of to-day may ruin me, and I am not a young man. My old age is near, and I suppose I shall always have to do for my unfortunate sister Ellen. But I could not allow myself to intrude so deeply on your generosity. As you have mentioned forty, I would hardly like to go back to the old figure. If we say thirty, six months after you are married to Millie, I shall be more than contented—I shall always think of you with gratitude."

"Very well," said Luxmore, who in his weak and shaken condition was not critical, and whom the vigour and earnestness of Catmur's protestations

overpowered. "Very well, let it be as you say, only I am not fit to talk business now."

"I know that," said Catmur earnestly. "Who can possibly know better than I how weak and upset you must feel now? I ask you one favour, it will cost you nothing. You can do it without any cost or trouble."

"What is it?"

"Suspend your judgment for a month, until you are quite well again, until I can take you over the ground and show you how the whole horrible accident happened. It can do you no harm to do what I ask. When the time is up and you have been over the ground, and you have heard my explanation and heard Jeff's, you may say what you please. But a word now to the doctor or anybody else would ruin the show, and I can't bear to have such a rumour get about—I mean a rumour imputing even carelessness. For you must know that if people began to say the wild beasts in Catmur's show were not properly secured and looked after, I might as well ring down the curtain forever, and that would be a hard ending after my long and arduous life."

"Yes, I'll do as you say. I'll tell the doctor that I made fun with the tiger and deserve what I got."

"I thank you more for that, Luxmore, than for your noble promise of the thirty thousand. You

won't mind saying that I left you while I went to post a letter, and that you opened the cage, and that was how it happened."

"I'll say that, if it's any good to you."

"Good to me! Why, my most generous friend, it's my life, my salvation."

"All right. I cannot talk any more now."

"Quite right. Do not say another word to me, and only what you said just now to the doctor. Hark! I hear him below. I'll fetch him up myself."

And Catmur hastened out of the room.

The doctor was old and matter-of-fact and not at all inquisitive. He said there was no danger to the patient's life, if complications did not set in. There were some severe scalp wounds, a simple fracture of the thigh-bone and shock to the system. With care and good nursing there was every reason to look for a satisfactory ending to the case. The patient had the inestimable blessing of good health and youth to befriend him. Would Mr. Catmur think of letting his young friend be taken to an hospital? Hospitals often gave a patient a better chance of speedy recovery than a private house, particularly in accident cases.

"Do you think the devotion of my niece and myself would be as good for him as an hospital?"

"Oh, much better! Sometimes people are glad to have cases of this kind treated in an hospital, that was all. No doubt Mr. Luxmore would make quicker progress if he were with friends."

"He is with friends," said Catmur with a quavering voice—"with friends who will pull him through, if good wishes and money and devotion can pull him through."

"The patient himself would no doubt rather be nursed here," said the doctor to Luxmore, who was now lying back exhausted after the examination.

"Oh, infinitely, thank you, doctor;" and so the matter was decided. Then the doctor took his leave, promising to send medicines and mechanical contrivances for the broken limb and to call again in the evening to see how the patient got on.

The time of the afternoon performance was now at hand, and Luxmore was left in the charge of Susan and Mrs. Starr, the latter sitting in the room, but entrusted with no duties or powers beyond those of handing a drink or summoning Susan if the injured man wanted anything.

The doctor sent some soothing draught, and shortly after taking it the shattered nerves of Luxmore lost their jarred, torn feeling and he sank into sleep.

No sooner was Catmur released from the Caves than he hastened back to the sick-room.

"You have had some sleep and already feel better," said he cheerfully.

"Yes. I feel better in a way and worse, but no worse than the doctor said I should be. I hope I am not in for fever and delirium."

"Oh, nothing of the kind. You will be a little feverish, no doubt, but nothing like downright fever, you know; and as to delirium, that only comes in bad cases, and yours is going to be a good case. You are going to cut the record of quick recoveries."

"I have been wondering what I ought to do about Mr. Greyborne," said the young man.

"He does not know you are here? He does not know anything of your coming here, or of Millie?" asked Catmur, affecting carelessness so as to deceive the secretary.

"No. He knows absolutely nothing at all."

"He can't very well come here," said Catmur, who had not yet had time to make new plans for the new condition of affairs.

"No, no," said Luxmore eagerly. "He could not see Miss Starr without being set thinking."

"But he could come here without seeing her. When you came here first you did not see her."

"That's true. If I am not back for dinner to-day

he will wonder what has happened to me. I have never yet failed to turn up at dinner."

"Can I do anything?" asked Catmur. "The evening show will be on us now in no time."

"Give me a pencil and a piece of paper," said Luxmore, "and I'll write a line."

When the note was finished Catmur took it to post it. The note was open. It ran:

"The Farm, Clayton Flat.

"Dear Sir,

"I have met with an accident. I have broken my leg and cannot move. The doctor says it will be weeks before I can get about.

"Yours very faithfully,

"Hugh Luxmore."

Catmur took the letter to post it. Before doing so he opened the freshly-gummed envelope and tore off the address. Then he dropped the letter into a pillar box at the other side of Clayton Flat and went on to the Caves for the evening performance.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LUXMORE'S NEW SCHEME.

After the evening performance Catmur came to Luxmore and said, "I am only too glad, Luxmore, to have you in my room. I am a light sleeper. If you want anything in the night you will call me. Here's a hand-bell. Millie is too tired after the show to come up. She'll come in the morning."

Dr. Frazer had made his second visit before Catmur's return from the show and declared the patient to be going on satisfactorily. He had sent another soothing draught, and Luxmore had taken it, so that he was in no humour for contention of conversation when Catmur came back. Luxmore was half asleep and only said, "Very well, thank you," and fell asleep soon after.

He awoke towards morning. For a while he had some difficulty in remembering where he was. At last it all came back to him with a flash, and for the first time from that awful moment when he saw the tiger flashing through the air at him his mind

was clear. The dull, heavy throbbing in his leg was more uneasiness than pain. His head was stiff and sore and aching, and all his blood seemed too hot and too thick. But his mind was comparatively clear—was clear enough for thinking over the case.

A lamp, dimmed down, was burning on the table, and Catmur, partly dressed, was snoring on a stretcher at the other end of the room. In the large and hospitable grate of the old farm-house a fire smouldered. There was not a sound to be heard but the heavy, incessant rumble of goods trains toiling in the desolate hours of darkness through Clayton Junction, in the distance, and the heavy breathing of the showman close at hand.

The first operation of thought in Luxmore's mind was alarming in the extreme:

Here was he lying helpless, within a dozen feet of the man who that morning had deliberately exposed him to death. Here was he in the silence and darkness of night under the roof of this lonely, isolated house, with the man who had that day deliberately tried to murder him.

No matter what Catmur had said to him and he had said to Catmur that day before the doctor came, the showman had thrust him into the wild beasts' house and locked him in, knowing the tiger was at

large, and with the intention that the beast should kill him.

Catmur had done this because his arrival on the scene and suggestion with respect to marrying the girl interfered with Catmur's schemes, though how Catmur calculated on making more than forty thousand pounds out of the secret he could not imagine.

That man sleeping over there had tried to murder him this day, and since that attempt no change had occurred which could lessen that man's desire for his death.

The situation was horrible, but he had been so near death in the Caves that death owned much less terror for him now than it had the day before. Twenty-four hours ago it had seemed death did not belong to the species of which he was a member, but to some species living elsewhere, infinitely in the future, fifty years off. Now he had looked at death, had made acquaintance with it, had touched it, had in fancy gone through its grim portals, and he felt calmer when thinking of it than he had of old felt in thinking of less awful things.

This man who had attempted his life in the morning would scarcely repeat the attempt under present circumstances. He had gone secretly to the Caves, no one knew whither he had intended

going, and if that beast had killed him, in all likelihood Catmur could have satisfied inquiry. But now half a dozen people knew where he was and a doctor was attending him. No violence would come to him under that roof.

No longer would he place the least reliance on Catmur. He would not trust the showman's protestations or promises. While he was in this house he should affect to treat Catmur as a friend and ally. But he would trust the showman in nothing, and out of this place he would get as soon as ever he could be moved.

He had no feeling of defeat. He had encountered a check; that was all. By and by he should be up and about, and he should put in operation other means of accomplishing his end. He should certainly have nothing more to do with Bartholomew Catmur beyond speaking him fair and keeping up the belief in the showman's mind that he still meant to trust and rely on Bart.

Why, already Catmur had begun to deceive him. Had he not been given to understand that the nursing would be undertaken by Millie, and had the girl been allowed in? Why, she had not even been introduced to him.

Oh, no, there was no trusting Bart Catmur. If he were to succeed he must succeed without the

showman—and he thought he could. It was a risk, no doubt, but he thought he could establish the identity of Millie Starr with Inez Greyborne to the satisfaction of John Greyborne without the aid of Bartholomew Catmur at all. His new scheme would take time and would be attended with risk—nay, even danger, but he felt moderately certain it would succeed.

He worked out his new scheme as well as he could lying there sore and maimed and useless. It would require care and time and boldness. Success up to a certain point he regarded as almost certain, but at the critical moment it might be that failure would confront him. In that case all would not be lost, though the chances against him would be greatly increased.

Next morning, to Catmur's astonishment and relief, the wounded man said to him:

"I was wakeful during the night, and I thought the whole affair and our hopes for the future over very carefully. You were kind enough to say Miss Starr might visit me and nurse me until I am well. Now, I don't think that would be wise at all."

"Eh?" said Catmur, at this voluntary anticipation of his own determination.

"You see, I am most anxious to create a favourable impression on Miss Starr."

"Well, that's only natural, as you hope to marry her," said Catmur with some uneasiness.

"And we cannot hope that I would create a favourable impression hurt and stricken down as I am now. It would, of course, be different if Miss Starr had known me before the accident."

"There's a good deal in what you say," muttered Catmur thoughtfully, "and perhaps it will be as well if Ellen sits with you as she did yesterday. You see the show takes up a good deal of Millie's time, and her performance might be queered if she was tired or thinking of other things. No doubt she has a firm hold of the code we use for the second-sight, but it might slip from her at any moment if she ran low in health. You'd like Ellen to sit with you, and Susan will always be within call; and if Susan only runs over to the Caves, why, one of us could be with you in a jiffy."

"It is very kind of you to think of all this, and I fancy what you say will be best."

"I hope so," said Catmur with a strong mental reservation. He could not believe Luxmore's motive was really in his words, and he could not invent or light upon any other reasonable motive.

"And now, Catmur, I want to thank Jeff Monday, if I may. I know he shot your tiger, but he saved my life."

"Of course—of course," said Catmur hastily. It never occurred to him before that anyone could be grateful for the preservation of Luxmore's life; and now that he saw the reasonableness of Luxmore himself feeling some gratitude, it occurred to him it must be very suspicious that up to this moment he had not recognised the fact that Luxmore ought to feel gratitude.

"Of course," said Catmur, "the minute Jeff comes over from the show (he spends an hour or two here every day) I'll bring him up to you."

The showman was troubled in his mind as he went downstairs. It fell in with his own intention that Millie should not see the secretary; but were the reasons the real reasons actuating the young man?

He had torn off the address at the top of the pencil-note written by Luxmore to Greyborne and sent on the note. For while it was most desirable that Greyborne's mind should be relieved so that no inquiries about his secretary might be set on foot, a visit from the contractor to the Flat Farm might be full of danger and difficulty.

The new turn of affairs had one thing in his favour. It placed Mr. Hugh Luxmore, private secretary to Mr. John Greyborne, the enormously rich father of Millie, completely in his hands for some time—some weeks. Now if he contemplated

taking action himself in the matter, he had such an opportunity as he could not have dared to hope for twenty-four hours before.

There was now no hurry about Luxmore. Prompt action might be desirable in another quarter, but Luxmore might safely be left as he was for a few days, at all events. That night after the show he would read over the declaration made by his dead wife. He had no doubt in his mind as to the terms of that affidavit, or whatever they called it, but it would be just as well for him to refresh his memory about it. Then to-morrow or next day he could carefully consider the desirability of his calling upon Mr. Greyborne at Lancaster Gate.

Jeff Monday came earlier than usual that morning. His occupation was gone, and time hung heavily on his hands. He who had meant no harm to anyone, who had no scheme or plot, had spent the most sleepless night of the three. He had never closed an eye at all. Usually he slept in a truckle bed made up in the pedestal of Rameses in the Cave of Sculptures, close to the door leading into the menagerie.

That miserable Thursday night he had not tried to sleep, he had not gone near Rameses. Had sat by the side of his old friend Ben in the cage of the tiger, with his back against the bars and his hand on

the battered, seared, misshapen head, the crown of which had been carried away by the bullet fired by him.

Catmur had said, with a view to conciliating Jeff, "I will get him stuffed and then you can have him in the show always."

"I will bury him to-morrow," said Jeff. "Stuffed! Do you think I am going to make a raree-show of him, of my friend? Do you think I am going to have him dead for hogs to tear and pluck? How could I live if I could see him every day and know him and he could never see or know me?"

"But, Jeff, by and by it would be a good line in the bills. 'The stuffed tiger Bengal that killed one keeper abroad and was in the act of killing another man when shot in the menagerie by Jeff Monday, the lion-tamer.' We can't afford to lose a line like that in the bills, Jeff."

"The tiger shall be buried to-morrow as he now lies. I'd bury him to-day, only—only I can't bear to part with him for ever just yet. We were such good pals."

"*You* will bury him as he is! *You!* I gave three hundred and fifty pounds for him, and the skin anyway is mine."

For an instant Jeff stared with those incomprehensible eyes out of his inscrutable face at the show-

man, and then said slowly, "Do you mean that the skin of the tiger is yours or mine, or that your skin is your own or the hangman's? Which, Bart Catmur? Because I have no time for looking into your meanings," and without waiting for an answer Jeff Monday strode away.

So Jeff sat the whole of that night in the dark in the cage of the tiger, now with his hand on the dead tiger's head, now smoking motionlessly, now stroking the fur of the neck, now stooping down and laying his cheek against the jaw of his friend. It was a vigil of expiation and farewell.

When he came to the house in the morning Catmur told him Luxmore wished to see him and thank him.

"Not to-day," said Jeff quietly. "Not to-day—another time—to-morrow. I have been with the tiger all the night."

"All the night!" cried Millie. "What doing?"

"I was trying to persuade myself I shot him, and I can't. I told him a thousand times over I shot him. But it wouldn't do. He seemed to be sorry he was dead, and could not rub himself against me to show me he did not mind."

"Jeff," said the girl, "come with me for a little walk; it will do you good. I am going to post a letter for Mr. Luxmore."

He turned submissively and walked beside the beautiful young creature with eyes staring at the horizon, at the dead tiger, at the jungle where the tiger had first seen light, at anything but what was near.

"He was a great deal to you, Jeff!" said the girl, looking at him with tearful sympathy.

"He was wife and child and home to me, Miss Millie. I have no one now. It is not having no one that hurts, Miss Millie, but having lost him. I have always lived alone, and I never loved but him, and he loved me, and I must kill him."

The girl burst into tears.

"I did not know, Miss Millie, you loved him well enough to cry for him," said Jeff, drawing up in amazement and looking at the girl for the first time.

"Oh, Jeff," she cried, "I am sorry."

He looked at her with that smile of wonderful sweetness that had no selfish greed in it. He was smiling at one who loved his tiger unknown to him. She must be good.

"I did not know, Miss Millie, that you loved him so well as to cry for him," he said softly, taking her hand. He wished to thank her because she cared for the unhandsome beast he loved.

"I am not crying for him," she said.

"Not crying for him?" he said in surprise. "What are you crying for?"

"For you."

He dropped her hand and started away from her and exclaimed, astonished, "Crying for me! You must not cry for me. Why should you cry for me?"

"I would give my life," said she. "Oh, Jeff, I would give my life that you had your tiger back again."

He stood looking at her in speechless amazement.

"Why?" he asked at length.

"Because the love you gave the tiger was the life of your life, and giving it was all you craved."

He was silent again for a while. Then he said:

"Giving and seeing him take was all I craved. But you would give and close your eyes before you saw me take."

"Oh, yes, yes, yes. For I should be sure you would be happy."

"No man," he said, "could love like that."

"I don't know, Jeff. I am only a woman."

"Ay," he said, "you are only a woman. Do all women feel like that?"

"I don't know, Jeff. I am only one."

"Ay, you are only one. I thought women liked to see their gifts received and acknowledged with handsome smiles."

"Perhaps they do. I speak for only one."

"Miss Millie, our talk made you cry. Would it please you to know it has taken my mind for a while off my loss?"

"Oh, I should be delighted, Jeff—delighted more than I could say in words."

"Then you may delight yourself. You have given me more subject for thought than all the world has given me up to this hour."

With a sob of delight the girl caught his hand. "I cannot believe it, Jeff. The pleasure and the honour are too great."

"Honour!" he said. "Honour! That word is right."

CHAPTER XIX.

JEFF AND MILLIE.

JEFF MONDAY had no notion of how he got through the two performances of the day before. He had no memory at all of how the leopards or the lion had behaved. Fortunately for him, from beginning to end he had to utter no words, save the few of invitation or encouragement to the beasts.

From the time he fired the fatal shot up to the time of his taking that walk with Millie—the first he had ever taken with her or any other woman—his mind was a blank, except the lonely watch by the body of the dead beast. He could remember nothing of what had occurred, and he was grateful that he could not remember.

But that walk with Millie seemed to have done him good. In it he felt he emerged from a region of smoke and mist. Up to that material things round him had worn an unreal aspect. There was no fog in the air to-day, and he thought to himself

that the walk and relief from the atmosphere of the show would account for the beneficial change in himself.

When he got back to the show it was time to dress for the afternoon performance. Millie's walk had not occupied quarter of an hour. But he did not go back to the Farm with her, he kept aloof from the Caves, wandering hither and thither through networks of mean, uninteresting streets, whose names he could not tell, of whose existence he had no knowledge until that day.

There was no hurry back. He was not uneasy about the dead tiger. He knew the side shutter-flap of the cage had not been let down, and that the door of the cage would not be opened in his absence, and that no one would disturb the body of the dead beast.

Catmur was obliged to be in the Caves from the opening of the doors. His own performance did not begin till forty minutes after the doors in Railway Avenue were open, and Millie's not till half an hour before the doors closed, for hers came last of all, and she took no share in any part of the entertainment but the second-sight and magic.

When Jeff at last reached the back door Millie had already arrived and was in the Cave of Magic and Monsters, and Catmur's lecture and sale of

busts were drawing to a close in the Cave of Sculptures.

As the swarthy lion-tamer hastened through the Cave of Monsters to dress in the menagerie beyond, he paused a moment in passing Millie and said:

"As you promised, the air has done me good. I feel a new man. I am twice the man I was this morning."

"Oh, thank you, thank you, Jeff," she said; "I am glad. It is good of you to tell me."

The Freaks could not believe their eyes. They looked from one to another as though a miracle had been wrought. Jeff Monday had never once before in passing through addressed a word to any member of that section. As a rule he was in the Cave of Beasts before the show opened. On the few occasions when he did go in through the Human Freaks he passed in silence, merely nodding to the Monsters as he went.

"I declare," said the Fat Woman, shaking out the vast amplitudes of her blue silk dress, "there's Jeff Monday taking notice of one of *us!* Just as he was a lord or the two-headed nightingale come to be one of *us*."

"Now that the tiger is dead," said the Human Shadow, a man so thin that he was fabled to cast no shadow, in an enormously bass voice, "he

is trying to scrape an acquaintance with us lions."

The Umbrella-haired Man, whose long black locks hung down over his shoulders like a half-closed parasol, suddenly extended his hair until it stood out at right angles to his head. He made no other comment. That was his way of expressing extreme emotion; and although the phenomenon was known to be due to whalebone and a string, it was felt that he had spoken out handsomely. The giant shrugged his shoulders, which, considering his size, was a very considerable contribution to the conversation.

Millie was out of hearing and sight of all this. She was standing by the open door, looking pensively out upon the dreary waste of Clayton Flat.

The girl was in a dreamy reverie. Up to that day her sympathies had never been strongly moved, beyond the feeling of grateful obligation to Bartholomew Catmur, and of absorbing, passionate devotion to the gentle, harmless, mindless woman whom from her earliest memory she had looked upon as her mother.

The death of the tiger was the first big sorrow that had come into her life, and the grief of Jeff Monday over the beast, his only friend, was the first tragedy she had witnessed.

In her solitude and isolation she had that feeling

common in lonely youth, that all things would always be the same save for the stealthy stealing of death upon the loved ones. She had seen the extraordinary, the overwhelming love of the lion-tamer for the beast and of the beast for him, and she had never tired of watching it and marvelling over it. She had read in books of something of the kind, but nothing so complete and astounding as the friendship, the strange partnership in love of these two. The tiger was ferocious to all except Jeff, and Jeff was cold to all except the tiger. She did not share Jeff's conviction that one day Ben would turn on him and rend him.

What was all mankind to Jeff, that he should kill the tiger to save one man's life? Her uncle had been guilty of great carelessness in shutting the young man into the menagerie without looking to see that everything was secure. But if two days ago anyone had asked her, "Would Jeff Monday kill the beast to save the man?" she should emphatically say, "No; Jeff would not kill Ben to save any man—to save himself. He would die rather than kill the beast, and he has always spoken with calm resignation of the tiger killing himself."

The man who had so loved, and who could, in obedience to a higher mandate than the promptings of his heart, slay the one creature on whom all his

heart was centred, had in him reserves of heroic self-denial and self-sacrifice past the comprehension of woman—past, at all events, her own comprehension. She had told him she could not comprehend his act, because she was only a woman, and he had accepted her excuse as an explanation. But all men were not, could not be like Jeff. There was in this man a oneness, a simplicity, a nobility of unselfishness incomprehensible to her, a lofty scorn of rewards, and a sacred love for mere love's sake that made the demigods of war and of philandering chivalry seem in comparison poor clay-made images with wooden heads.

It was true her own experience of life and men did not qualify her to estimate life or men. From her earliest memory she had been kept apart more like the heroine of an Eastern romance than a simple maiden of prosaic England. She had never been sent to school. She had had governesses to teach her all she learned. From what she had read in books she knew her education was far better than other girls in her position enjoyed. But she had never associated with other girls. She had been cloistered all her life. She had never had a drawing master, or a dancing master, or a music master. She had met no man half a dozen times, except her uncle and Jeff. But Jeff had been so silent and un-

obtrusive, that, although in the house every day for a year, she seemed to know him less than the man who brought food to the Farm.

For a long time Jeff had seemed to her one of an order of beings different from herself. She knew her uncle's great aim, his consuming desire was to get money—money for what she could not understand. To her it seemed her uncle had more than he wanted; he certainly had more than he made use of. But Jeff did not care for money. She had read of men whose whole heart was in their work. But Jeff's whole heart was not in his business as a lion-tamer, but in that one hideous and ferocious beast. He displayed no great wish to excel with the leopards or the lion. Indeed, he showed no wish to excel with the tiger either. He went through his performances with the leopards and the lion in a workman-like manner, like one fairly trying to do his best, but showing no enthusiasm.

Jeff, when first he entered the employment of her uncle, had been asked to the Farm in honour of his appointment as lion-tamer to the show. Her uncle told her he had heard much about Jeff, and that the new hand never for an hour even went away of his own free will from the menagerie in which he had been associated with Ben. This devotion, or indolence, or whatever it was, could not be good for Jeff,

so, partly out of kindness, and partly out of a wish to keep the most valuable member of his troupe in good health, Catmur found excuses for asking the swarthy, taciturn man, who did not care for money, to come to the Farm every day.

The only thing or person that Jeff showed any interest in in her uncle's household was her gentle, imbecile mother. He had a method of deferential chivalry towards the afflicted woman that further impressed Millie with the feeling of his being different in kind from those around her. He always treated her mother as if her intellect were unimpaired, but as though she suffered from some trifling and transitory physical disablement. He had suggested the notion of getting the Bath chair for the imbecile woman, and he had volunteered to take her about in it on the Flat. His influence over the tiger was a marvellous triumph of unrequiring love over a savage nature; his devotion to the imbecile woman a pathetic homily. He seemed to give to the tiger for his own personal love of giving, and to give to the afflicted woman out of obedience to an instinctive obedience to an ordinance of Heaven.

That Friday afternoon, as Millie looked out on the dreary Clayton Flat through the open door at the back of Catmur's Caves, she went over in her mind all she had ever seen of Jeff, and her eyes filled

with tears for which she could not account—tears, it may be, of gratitude for having been admitted into this holy of holies of unselfish love.

When the show was over and she was going home alone across the dreary Flat, he came behind her and said, "You told me to-day you would give your life if I might have the tiger back."

"I did. It is true," she said, looking around on him with a face of pain in sympathy with his pain.

He was smiling, the wonderful unselfish smile that now and then made his swarthy face shine with the brightness of the spirit.

"In the gipsy tents where I was reared they told me that because of my plain looks no woman would ever give me her love; and yet you said this morning you would give me your life. I know that a woman would often rather give her life than her love. But since you spoke to-day about giving your life for me, I have been asking, Were the gipsies wrong? If I had good looks I could not give them to you. They would be always mine. But I could give you all my love if you would take it. I would like to give you all my love; I see by the tears in your eyes that you could understand it. Will you take it?"

"Yes, Jeff."

CHAPTER XX.

THE FLIGHT OF THE LAME DUCKS.

To the letter which Millie had posted that morning for Hugh Luxmore attached a great deal of importance. The pencil note, written by him the day before, had brought no response last night or this morning. The secretary knew Mr. John Greyborne was not an emotional man, or, rather, he was not a man given to displaying emotions. But Luxmore believed the absence of display of feeling in Mr. Greyborne's daily life was to be accounted for more by an instinctive avoidance of situations and circumstances calculated to rouse feeling than inherent apathy.

At all events, Luxmore was quite certain the contractor was not unkind or callous, and he could not believe the old man had got his pencil note, and tossed it carelessly on one side, as deserving no attention, or a thing to receive attention in some odd hour of leisure a day or a week hence. No, if Mr. Greyborne had got that note, a message of

some kind would certainly have come the evening it was sent, or at latest the morning after.

Clearly Catmur, to whom in that hour of confusion and pain he had entrusted the posting of the note, had intercepted it. Indeed, now when he thought of the matter in the morning, he wondered how even in his dazed and shattered condition he had been so simple as to confide his letter to Bart Catmur.

The scheme which had been shaping in his head all night had now taken definite form. The writing materials of the evening before lay on the table at his bedside. As soon as Catmur left the room he wrote a long letter, put it in an envelope and directed it to Louis Bertram, 14 Palgrave Street, Charing Cross. When Dr. Frazer paid his morning visit, Luxmore asked him to post the letter for him.

"It is a letter of some consequence," he said to the doctor when there was no one in the room but Mrs. Starr. "It is private, and if you will take the trouble to drop it into the post with your own hand, I should feel very much obliged."

The doctor promised. He had found his patient going on well, and said nothing could be better than the progress in the case.

After the doctor's visit the patient did not seem quite so calm. During the absence of Catmur at

the midday performance he tried to occupy himself reading a newspaper, but failed. He began several conversations with Mrs. Starr, but found nothing but smiling acquiescence could be got from her. Any reference to the accident of seventeen years ago reminded her of the weakness in her child's foot, and led to a repetition in changeless form of the former assertion, that if you put the child standing by a chair you would at once see the ankle turned in.

When Catmur and Millie had gone to the Caves for the evening performance Luxmore's excitement increased. He asked Mrs. Starr to tell Susan he wanted her most particularly.

"I don't feel well at all," he said to the stolid maid-servant. "I am certainly going to have fever. The doctor told me if I got a pain in my head, and felt a burning thirst, I was at once to send for this." He held out a piece of paper. "You are to take a cab, Dr. Frazer said, and drive to this address. The bottle you are to bring will be waiting for you, and I know, Susan, you are too good-natured to delay either going or coming back. Until you do come back I shall be in the greatest agony. Dr. Frazer said that this was the only thing that could do me any good, and it can be got at only one place in London."

The words on the paper he gave the girl were: "Please give bearer a bottle of the soothing mixture." The order was addressed to Louis Bertram, 14 Palgrave Street, Charing Cross.

Susan hesitated. "I have orders," she said, "not to leave the house while master is away."

"When did Mr. Catmur give you those orders? To-day?"

"No. Not to-day. Them are my orders always."

"They don't apply now. I'll take care of Mrs. Starr," said he, confident that Susan was too stupid to see the absurdity of him in his present condition offering to take care of anyone. "Of course, when Mr. Catmur gave them, they were meant to prevent Mrs. Starr being left alone in the house. Besides, I have no one else to send, and if you don't go and come back in less than an hour I shall in all likelihood be a dead man, and the loss of the tiger will be in vain. For the love of heaven, Susan, don't stand there and see an unfortunate young fellow die before your eyes, for want of going a message left by the doctor to save his life!"

This appeal was too much for Susan. The expedition had not, of course, the direct sanction of Catmur, neither had he barred it explicitly. It was inconceivable to her that the master would have

been reconciled to the loss of the tiger which cost hundreds and hundreds of pounds, and grudge her going a mile or two in a cab to fetch medicine for this man who was in danger of death if the remedy were not procured. In fact, for the first time while Susan was in Catmur's employment, she ventured to think for herself, with the result that her master would have given the price of ten tigers to obviate or undo.

At the show that evening nothing of interest outside the business of the performance occurred. Millie did not say anything to Catmur about what had passed between herself and the lion-tamer that eventful day. Indeed, it did not enter her mind there was anything to tell. Catmur had never treated her exactly with affection or exactly with respect, but with a combination of both, modified by his constitutional reserve. He had never assumed authority over her: he guided and directed rather than governed her. She was always submissive and obedient to him, because he was always reasonable to her. At times he was harsh, abrupt, peremptory to her mother, but never to herself. She excused the abruptness of his manner to her mother by reflecting that the unhappy state of her mother's mind had in years developed in her much the habit of command.

Millie Starr knew nothing at all of the world. Except what she had read in books and heard from the governesses, she had no means of knowing anything of the world. To her, the world of to-day, which she had to take wholly on report, had no more present real existence than the world of England under the heptarchy.

Of course, speaking to her mother was completely out of the question. Her mother's mind was not stronger or more useful than that of a child of a year old. Indeed, in Millie's fanciful moments it had often seemed to her that at the time of that accident years ago, when Mr. Greyborne's child was killed, the intellect of the child had by some strange transmigration taken possession of the brain of the woman.

But she felt no necessity to speak to anyone at all. She was quite satisfied. She felt a contentment which had never been hers before. She had always felt alone and isolated. She had often felt that life was only a procession of phantoms. Now things had become more settled and real—had become quite settled and real. She had evidently been promoted out of chaos into order. She felt not only justified, but she felt that she should now be of use in life.

That lonely man had lived apart from love be-

cause he thought his face would keep woman's love away from him. Now that lonely man need have no such thought longer. He could have all her love and devotion. She had found a most precious use for herself. It was to be sweet to him, so that his spirit might have peace.

That evening, as she and Catmur were going home from the show, he said to her, "Millie, let us take a turn this way. There is something very important I wish to say to you."

"About Jeff?" she said incredulously, for she could not believe that the lion-tamer had spoken to him about what had passed that day.

"No, not about Jeff. About yourself."

"About myself!" she said in surprise, "something serious about myself!"

"It is nothing unpleasant. It is nothing that you might not be proud to hear. It is something that ought to please you very much. One of those days you will be enormously rich."

She laughed. "Is my clairvoyance so very wonderful, uncle? Well, if it is, and I make a great deal of money by it, I shall know who taught me," she added more gravely.

"Yes, I taught you. But now it seems to me one of those days you may bitterly regret that I ever taught you, and you may learn to loathe the

name of Catmur for ever having allowed you inside the doors of the Caves."

"Uncle! uncle! What are you saying? You are not serious? You cannot wish that I should seriously deny the possibility of my forgetting all your goodness to my mother and myself."

"No, Millie, I don't for a moment think you could be ungrateful. Indeed I do not, my child. I do not mean that, clever though your second-sight and code performance is, that you could ever make a fortune in that way. But great riches coming suddenly often make people wish to forget the days they spent in comparative poverty and the people with whom their poor days were passed."

"But, uncle, when you say this you are not thinking of me?" said the girl in wonder.

"I am."

"But how could I forget my mother and you, uncle, who have been so good—so wonderfully good to the mindless widow without a penny and the helpless child? Oh, uncle, uncle, I cannot—I will not believe you are thinking of me when you say such things. Indeed, indeed, when you say such things with me in your mind you are thinking a most unnecessary, a most painfully unnecessary, a most horribly painful thing."

"Millie, you must not fancy for one moment I

am saying what is not necessary. I have lately made discoveries which tell me as plain as my words can tell you that the day will come when you will wish you never crossed the threshold of Catmur's Caves, or the threshold of Catmur's house.

"Uncle, I will not listen to you if you say such things. You have never until now said an unkind thing to me in all your life, and now you are saying so cruel a thing to me that it would break my heart if I minded what you say."

"Millie, I would put down my life on your word, I know, my dear child, you do not know what a falsehood is. I know you would die before you would break any promise you made. Will you give me your promise to-night that you will always believe I have done the best I could for you?"

"For me; and, what is more to me, for my poor mother."

"I have done my duty, I hope, by Ellen, but I want you now not only to promise but to swear you will never cease to believe I did my very best for you."

"If you wish it I swear it."

"Well, Millie, you may take my word for it, one day you will be enormously rich. If when you are enormously rich I show you one way in which you can repay me, will you do it?"

"I swear, uncle, I will repay you in that one way."

"Don't say, 'I swear, uncle.' Say, 'I swear, Bartholomew Catmur.' What cry was that? A cry from the Farm?"

"It is like Susan's voice."

"Well, do you swear?"

"I swear, Bartholomew Catmur, to repay you in the way you point out."

"There is the cry again. Why, here's Susan darting across the Flat. What is the matter, Susan?"

"Oh, master, the strange young gentleman and Mrs. Starr are not at the house."

"Not at the house!"

"They are both gone!"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE DESERTED HOUSE.

The astounding information conveyed in the wild words of the stupid maid Susan suddenly put a stop to anything further Catmur had intended to say to Millie about the past or future.

He had found great difficulty in arranging in his mind what he should tell Millie. It was necessary for him to tell her something, but how much? If he told her all at once it would be incredible and overwhelming. The girl would not be able to realise the meaning or importance of his revelation. He was not sure the girl would be able to grasp the fact that Ellen Starr was not her mother, and he felt perfectly sure that Millie would receive the news with the utmost consternation and grief.

With regard to his design of making Millie his wife, it seemed more difficult to be carried out now that the moment for action had arrived than when

he was merely contemplating it in an off-hand way in the future. The girl had looked on him all her life as her uncle. Time would be necessary before he could approach her as a suitor. Of course, he was not going to make a fool of himself and pose as the enamoured swain. That would be ridiculous. It would be necessary for him to approach gradually. He would pretend he had only recently discovered she was John Greyborne's daughter, and then he would appeal to her gratitude and ask her to marry him, as the only way in which she could share her wealth with him and impose upon him no sense of humiliating obligation. He must speak to her at once in this sense. He must approach the matter before that young jackanapes, that young dandy Luxmore, had a chance of saying a word to her. Up to this the girl had never spent an hour with any young man—with any man at all who could have put notions of love or marriage or anything of the kind into her head. He must make sure of being first with Millie before Luxmore got about or could meet the girl. Thus far he had sedulously kept her secluded from any man who might in the remotest way interfere with his own wish to make her his wife when time was ripe for the revelation to her of the secret of her birth.

He now stood in no great fear of Luxmore on ac-

count of the tiger episode. Luxmore himself had given to Dr. Frazer an account of the affair, and Dr. Frazer's evidence could be produced in support of his own version of the affair. If Luxmore now tried to tell his version, as near to the true version as he could know or guess, just short of the true version, there would be his own account of the affair, the doctor's account of Luxmore's own first account and Jeff's account. Jeff said he killed the tiger to save his neck from the rope. Up to the firing of that shot he believed Jeff would have killed himself rather than the tiger. Now that Jeff had shown how much he would do to save his master's life, it was obvious he would back up his master's story if the law menaced his master's liberty.

He had therefore made up his mind to reveal matters gradually to Millie, beginning that very evening with the announcement that she would one day come in to great riches, and getting her to promise blindly and most solemnly that she would repay him in the only way that would be worthy of the obligation conferred on her. That this way was her acceptance of him as a husband need not be revealed to her until later.

And now into the middle of his scheme, which had since the failure of the arrangement in the menagerie been going on fairly well, had plunged the stupid

maid Susan with her incredible story that the imbecile woman, who was incapable of suggesting to herself that she should go from one room to another in search of food when she wanted it, and this young man, whose thigh was broken, and who could not expect to put the leg under him for months, had fled the lonely house!

Catmur seized Susan by the arm and said fiercely, 'The young man and my sister gone! Tell me, girl, in a word what you mean!" He tightened his hold on her arm until the girl winced.

"Mr. Luxmore, the young man, said the doctor told him if he got a pain in his head only one medicine could save his life. He told me it could only be got at Charing Cross. I took a cab there. When I came back they were gone—the two."

With an oath Catmur led the way across the Flat to the Farm.

When they entered the house Catmur dashed through it from end to end, from top to bottom, frantic with rage. The house was not a large one, but it was full of nooks and crannies, and it had large, rambling cellars. Not a square foot of it did Catmur leave unexplored. He found plenty of traces of the fugitives, but not the thinnest clue.

During the search Millie and Susan sat terrified in the parlour on the left hand of the hall. The rage

of the man, his glaring eyes, his white face, his clenched teeth, his stertorous breathing, his unworded ferocity, froze the women with a new dread. They had never seen this man, they had never seen any man, in such a blind and ravening rage before.

There was no gas in the house. It was lighted by oil lamps in the passages and sitting-rooms. Candles were used for moving about. Catmur seized a candle, tore it out of the candlestick and held it in his naked hand. It sweated and guttered over his black frock-coat and black cloth waistcoat and trousers. His warm hand softened the grease of the candle, and the fierce pressure of his fingers pressed the grease through his fingers until his hand looked a shapeless mass of purple flesh and pallid grease like raw meat in a butcher's. The cellars were low, and against a beam in one of them he had cut his head just under the hair in front, and the blood from the cut flowed down his forehead and nose and trickled over his lipless mouth and chin. He was a ghastly, hideous sight to the two terrified girls sitting, expecting they knew not what, in the murky lamplight of the dingy old parlour.

At last he staggered into the parlour exhausted, beaten, blowing and snorting like a savage animal wounded to death.

He flung himself on a chair, and opening the hand clasping the candle, put the candle under his foot and pulled his hand away from it and left the grease sticking to his hand.

He was a hideous sight, and the two women stared at him in speechless terror.

"You have no notion," said he at length, "of where they're gone or of whether they went away together?"

"No, master. When I came back I saw what you see now; no more, no less."

Millie was paralysed with fears. First, what could have induced this poor helpless, mindless mother of hers to go away? She had not been so much induced to go away as taken away, for the afflicted woman would have obeyed a child often as readily as she obeyed her daughter or brother. What could account for her uncle's extraordinary, unexampled excitement? She had never seen him in such a condition before. She had never seen anyone at all so distracted. Could the strange things her uncle had been saying to her just as Susan came up have anything to do with the awful manifestation? If her mother had disappeared thus at dead of night under ordinary circumstances, she would have felt distracted with apprehension. But with this man Luxmore gone too, a man who was

supposed not to be able to leave his bed for weeks —gone also, and apparently with her, and with this man tearing through the house like a maniac. She felt bereft of ordinary powers and quite helpless, like one looking at a spectacle, while held motionless by the spell of some narcotic drug.

"How long were you away?" he asked harshly.

"An hour or over. The man I went to said the medicine would take time to make, but I must wait, as if the young man did not get it at once he would die."

"Hah!"

"And I thought you were so anxious to get the young man well you would like me to stay."

"Hah!" again grunted Catmur savagely. "You have that address?"

"Yes." She timidly held out the paper Luxmore had given her towards him. He snatched it from her, and without waiting to get a hat he dashed out of the house, saying, "Wait up till I come back. I'll send Jeff to look after you."

As he spoke he was gone.

The night was clear and bright. He ran across the open waste between the Farm and the back entrance to the Caves. He found Jeff Monday smoking by the open door. In a few hurried words he told the lion-tamer what had occurred, and asked

him to go over to the house and stay there till he came back. He did not explain anything. He merely said the two had disappeared, and he was off to an address which he had found with Susan, who was sitting up with Millie.

Jeff started at once for the Farm, and Catmur went through the Caves out to Railway Avenue. He jumped into a hansom and drove to Palgrave Street. Number 14 was a private house. They were nearly all private houses in the street. He knocked half a dozen times without getting any reply.

At length a head was put out of an upper window.

"What is it? What do you mean by kicking up such a row at such a time? Who are you? What do you want?"

"My name is Catmur."

"A bad name. A name I don't like at all."

"Why?"

"Oh, because it has a bad sound. It isn't a bit euphonious and is no excuse in the world for you kicking up such a row, you know. What do you want?"

"Is Mr. Luxmore here?"

"No."

"Is Mrs. Starr here?"

"No. This is not an hotel or a home for inebriates."

"Do you know Mr. Luxmore?"

"Will you go away? I am leaving the window, but only for a moment. I am going for the water jug. . . Now I have the water jug. If you don't go away to lock up your tiger, Mr. Catmur, before I count three, I shall just empty the water jug on your head, and then blow my whistle for the police. One—two—three—there goes the water. I gave you fair warning. Go home and lock up your tiger. I'll give you while I count three to clear out. Then I blow my whistle. Now. One—two—Oh, you're off! Very well. Don't come here again. I don't like your name and I don't like your ways."

He had kept the cab. He told the driver to take him back to Clayton Junction.

Catmur durst not go to Lancaster Gate at such an hour, and besides he felt certain Luxmore was not there. He had, of course, he knew, no more right to follow Luxmore than any man passing him by in the street, but he fancied he had some right to look after his unfortunate sister.

All at once his fury left him.

Why should he suppose Hugh Luxmore had gone to a private house? Why should he not suppose Hugh Luxmore had gone to a police station?

But if the young man had gone to a police station, why had he taken Ellen with him ?

There was no satisfactory answer to be got to any of these questions to-night. Should he be able to find satisfactory answers for them to-morrow ?

CHAPTER XXII.

THE WHEEL OF MEMORY GOES ROUND.

When Catmur got back to the Farm he found Jeff Monday in an easy-chair smoking. Susan was sitting with her head against the wall asleep. Millie, who had been seated by the table with her head lowered on her hands, rose when she heard Catmur's foot, but had not strength to go to the door to meet him. "Any news, uncle?" she asked in a faint voice.

"No," he said shortly, as he flung himself on a chair and stared blindly at Jeff Monday without seeing him.

"Oh! what is to be done?—what is to be done, uncle? Where has my poor darling gone?" cried Millie desperately. "She will die. She will be killed in the streets. She is not fit to be away even for a minute. Oh, uncle, uncle, it can't be that she was spared in that dreadful accident years ago when Mr. Greyborne's child was killed, and that she is now to be killed in the streets when helpless and alone

more helpless than the baby that lost its life then?"

Catmur glared at the girl and said harshly, "As far as that goes she is safe. She went away with Luxmore."

"But why? Why should she go away? Why should she go away with him? She is nothing to him. She does not know him. Something must be done."

"What?" said Catmur hoarsely. "What can be done? I have done all that can be done to-night."

"But could not we go to the police? I will go to the police."

Catmur sprang to his feet with an oath. "You, madam, you!" he cried scornfully, as he stamped and smote the table with his fist. "Who are *you*, and what do you know, that you should interfere? This is my affair and this is my house, and what I say must be done. If you, madam, dare to raise your voice——"

"Bart Catmur," said Jeff Monday, taking his pipe out of his mouth as he interrupted the foaming showman, and speaking very quietly, very slowly, "before you go any further and swear any more and 'madam' Millie any more, suppose I leave the room——"

"I wish you would, sir. I do not want anyone to remain in this room, in this house, who dares to interfere with me or suggest what I should do."

"Very well, Bart Catmur, since it has come to madaming Millie and sirring me, I will go. You cannot stop my going as you can Millie's——"

"Will you, sir, have the goodness not to refer to my niece but as Miss Starr, and will you, sir, have the goodness to take your sick nigger face out of my house?" The showman was now foaming and fuming and stamping up and down the room like a madman.

Jeff Monday put his hand on Catmur's shoulder as they met in the middle of the room. "Bart Catmur," said Jeff, looking out of his dark, inscrutable eyes at the showman, "I never saw you like this before."

For the first time in Catmur's life he felt a restraining hand on his shoulder. Instantly his fury failed. Instantly he became calm. Instantly he recognized that some new influence was at work, some new power was upon him. He looked fixedly at the lion-tamer, and stared as if aroused out of sleep.

Jeff kept his strange, unseeing gaze fixed on the showman. "Bart Catmur, no doubt you have a right to order me out of your house, and no doubt you can prevent Millie going to the police, but you cannot prevent *me* going to the police."

Catmur wiped his forehead with his hand, looked at his wet, blood-stained palm, shuddered, drew a

long breath, and said, with the sigh of a man whose eyes have been opened as he was about to step into an abyss: "You are right, Jeff. I lost my temper. But the girls had better go to bed. Nothing can be done to-night. I beg pardon all round for having lost my temper."

"Yes," said Jeff, "you, Millie, and Susan had better go to bed. Nothing can be done to-night. I dare say we shall find your mother in the morning, Millie. You need not be afraid."

Catmur sank on a chair, and Millie and Susan passed out through the door held open by Jeff Monday.

The lion-tamer came back to the easy-chair in which he had been when Catmur entered, sat down, settled himself well back in the chair and lit his pipe. The two men were facing one another, Catmur sitting by the table in the middle of the room, full in the light of the shaded lamp. The showman's face was pale, with strange white streaks through it, as though here and there it were dead. No sound could now be heard in that room but the distant rumble of innumerable trains.

At length Catmur spoke, staring stupidly at the lion-tamer in the distant gloom. "I think, Jeff, I have been out of my mind for a few minutes."

"Most likely," said Jeff, slowly. "You wanted

looking after a few minutes ago as badly as ever your sister did. Have you no notion of where the poor demented thing is gone to, of who took her away or why she was taken away, for, of course, go herself she could not?"

"No, she could not get away herself, and she could not want to get away herself. She could not get away unless someone *took* her away, and there was no one to take her away but this man Luxmore."

"What! a man with a broken thigh take away a poor mindless creature!" said Jeff, ceasing to smoke and keeping his eyes fixed on the pale, unwholesome, blotchy, blood-stained, terrified face of the showman.

"That's the only thing I can think of," said Catmur. He felt like a hunted animal which knows it is pursued and that its enemies are closing in on all sides, does not know from what quarter to expect attack, and feels its strength rapidly decaying, is in its last hiding place and conscious of powerlessness to strike a blow in defence of life.

Bart Catmur had not a friend in all the world. He confided in no man. In the matter of the statues he had of course confederates, but in no matter had he confidants. Jeff Monday may or may not have found out about the busts. He had lied to Luxmore

when he told him Jeff used knowledge of the smuggling to blackmail him. Jeff had never any occasion to know anything about the smuggling, and Catmur had never any proof that Jeff did know.

Jeff knew what was ten thousand times worse than the smuggling: he knew of the attempt on Luxmore's life. He knew that the tiger's knife was not lifted in rehearsal of a play over the young man's neck the day before yesterday. He knew the tiger had not got loose accidentally yesterday. He knew Catmur had not by mere misadventure locked the young man into the menagerie in which the beast was at large.

Should he tell Jeff Monday all? Jeff showed his good-will yesterday in killing the tiger to save him from committing murder. Should he trust Jeff with the whole secret? Should he tell Jeff why he had lifted the knife and turned the tiger loose? Should he tell the lion-tamer how this dandified jackanapes had come offering to marry Millie, when he found out that Millie was rich Greyborne's only child, a fact he himself had known for seventeen years? Should he tell Jeff how for some years back he had thought of nothing day and night but marrying Millie when she grew up and spending the remainder of his life in affluence and splendour, and now this young prinker wanted to come between him

and the reward of seventeen years. Jeff knew more than enough to lock him up for life, why not trust Jeff altogether? He was quite sure Jeff would never make an unfriendly use of anything he told him. Jeff would not inform against him. Jeff was a man of honour. He would trust all to Jeff Monday. He would tell the lion-tamer the whole story of the girl and of Luxmore's designs, and then he would confide in Jeff his own belief that Luxmore had caused himself to be carried off by friends while there was no one but himself and the widow in the house, and that he had carried off the widow with him in the hope that she might now and then have a lucid interval, during which an account of the real occurrences at that accident could be obtained from Ellen. Jeff had always shown extraordinary kindness and attention to the imbecile woman. The first thing for him to do would be to explain what object Luxmore in all probability had in carrying off the widow, an object which caused him no uneasiness, for Ellen had never in seventeen years had one moment of clear reason.

Catmur was startled from his profound reverie by the voice of Jeff Monday saying:

"I shall bury the tiger to-morrow."

"Oh! Ah! will you?" said Catmur, but half hearing and half understanding.

"Yes; I shall bury the tiger to-morrow. Bart Catmur, are you awake? Are you listening to me?"

"Ay. I am awake and listening, Jeff. If you have anything to say, speak out. There is something I want to say to you when you have done."

"Very good. I have something to say to you." He put his pipe in his pocket, and clasping his small, delicately made hands in front of him, sat rigid, stiff. "Yesterday I shot the tiger—the only thing I loved in the world—to save you from the hangman's rope. When I shot my only friend, I thought of nothing but keeping the blood of murder from your hands. I only thought, 'Bart is a man who has been fair to me. He is now no man. Owing to something or another, he is now no man, but a ferocious, mad, blood-seeking fiend. I will save the man who has been fair to me from this ferocious, bloodthirsty fiend.' So, Bart, I shot the tiger, my only friend."

"Yes; well?"

"To-morrow I shall bury the tiger, and I shall be alone. I want you to give me something for my heart to love."

"What! The fool? Ellen?"

"No, the girl, Millie."

"Millie! *You* want Millie!" shouted Catmur, springing to his feet, and advancing towards him

threateningly. "Are you mad too? Are you mad too? You want Millie! Man, do you expect me to keep my hands off you?"

"Yesterday, Bart Catmur, to save your neck from the hangman's rope, I shot my tiger——"

"*Your* tiger! You lying scoundrel! *My* tiger. The beast I gave my money for! Your tiger!" He stood before Jeff, foaming at the mouth, shaking his trembling fist in the face of Jeff Monday, sitting rigidly back in the easy-chair.

"Yesterday, Bart Catmur, to save your life, I shot my tiger, and it was all I loved in the world—all I had in the world. To-day I ask you for the girl."

"You ask me for the girl! I tell you, you shall never, never, never get her!" roared Catmur, shaking and panting. The foam flew from his lips. He dug his nails into his palms until there were pools of blood where the nails bit the flesh. The cut on his head burst forth again and fresh blood flowed down his purple, congested face.

"I ask you for the girl, and I am as sure I shall get her as I was that I should save your life when I caught the butt of the tiger's lug on the sight of the rifle."

"What! You, an honourable man, would blackmail me for a girl's sake?" shouted Catmur, scornfully.

"No; I would not blackmail you for any sake. But I will marry the girl in spite of you, Bart Catmur—in spite of all the world!"

"What, you ungrateful, sick nigger, would you throw me over for love of a girl?"

"Well, yes, no doubt, but that is not the reason I am going to marry Millie. I might do without her, as I have done without all things, if it had not been for one thing."

"And what is that?" he cried fiercely.

"Millie loves me, and nothing in all the world counts beside that."

"Millie loves you!" cried Catmur, grasping his neck below his ears and crushing the flesh of his neck.

"Millie loves me, and has promised to be my wife."

"I am hit here! My head!" cried Catmur, in a suffocating voice, as he fell to the floor.

CHAPTER XXIII.

TWO MESSAGES TO MR. GREYBORNE.

Hugh Luxmore's plan of flight, including the abduction of Mrs. Starr, was very simple, and, owing to the mode of life and habits of the Farm household, most easy of execution.

Several considerations made him resolve to get from under the roof of Bartholomew Catmur. In the first place, it was not pleasant to lie helpless in the house of a man who, he was firmly convinced, had attempted his life. Then he felt sure his letter to Mr. Greyborne had been suppressed or tampered with. It would be impossible for him to recover quickly, or at all, while completely at the mercy and in the power of this man Catmur.

The one thing which made him resolve to carry off Mrs. Starr with him was that he had a hope that she, under favourable conditions and medical treatment, might recover memory, and be able to establish the identity of Millie without the assistance of Catmur at all. He had no intention of prosecuting

Catmur; prosecutions were always doubtful in issue; and even if he could prove Catmur had knowingly locked him up with the ferocious brute, the conviction would not one jot forward his designs of making Millie his wife. But he now felt it would be a monstrous fatuity to place faith any longer in the showman, and the idea of bargaining with him and paying him a large sum of money was revolting, sickening.

Luxmore had a friend, Louis Bertram, a man of thirty-five years of age, who enjoyed a moderate private income, was a bachelor, and might be described as the universal amateur. He had been in the army, had then taken to the law, later tried medicine. Then he went on the stage for a while, gave up the stage and took to painting, wrote a novel and a volume of verse, was a member of half a dozen clubs, a universal favourite, and always ready to engage in any scheme which promised amusement or excitement. He acted on the principle that it was better to burn out than rust out, and he would rather lead a forlorn hope in any cause at all than sit still and do nothing in the best cause on earth.

To Louis Bertram, 14 Palgrave Street, Charing Cross, Luxmore wrote that long letter on Friday morning.

Luxmore said that in an accident which was not

wholly an accident—an accident contrived by an enemy, in fact—he had broken his leg. That Bertram was to come that evening to the Farm at nine o'clock with an ambulance to carry him away and a cab for a lady of weak intellect who was to accompany him. The elderly lady was to pass as Luxmore's aunt, and all other matters would be explained to Bertram, the fact being that the writer was much shaken, but that if all went well now and with the plan entrusted to Bertram, Luxmore would in the end, and in a highly honourable and creditable way, come into an enormous fortune and marry a beautiful wife.

To bear an active part in such an enterprise, Bertram would have freely sacrificed all the grave historic sanctities of the British Constitution.

Accordingly he did all things necessary, and at nine o'clock carried off in an ambulance Hugh Luxmore, and in a friend's brougham, which he drove himself, the submissive Mrs. Starr. At eight minutes past twelve o'clock he lied to Catmur in saying Hugh Luxmore was not in his house, and at nine and a half minutes past he emptied the water jug on Catmur's head. At twelve minutes past he went back to Luxmore and informed the secretary with great glee that the enemy had been put to flight with ignominy and a cataclysm.

The obedient, uncomplaining, submissive Mrs. Starr had been handed over to Bertram's discreet housekeeper, and Luxmore had been accommodated with a back room on the second floor.

The visit of Catmur to Palgrave Street had interrupted a chat between Luxmore and Bertram. When the short, energetic, light-haired owner of the house was once more quiet enough to allow Luxmore to go on with his history, the secretary said:

"I have now, Bertram, told you everything up to the point at which I resolved not only to escape from the power of that merciless scoundrel, but to carry off this Mrs. Starr with me. She has been for many years suffering from feebleness of mind and suspension of memory. She is a complete idiot, an imbecile. The day before yesterday, when I called first on Catmur, he took me to his house and introduced me to this unfortunate woman, and made me put my finger on the portion of her head that was injured. There is in the bone a depression. Now I have over and over again read of operations applying to this case—operations in which the depressed piece of bone being raised, the memory was restored. I do not know that the time of depression was ever so long as seventeen years."

"Of course, my dear fellow," cried the little man enthusiastically, "the operation is one of the most

commonplace nowadays in the higher walks of the profession. Any hospital in London would be only too glad to get hold of our dear friend, Mrs Ellen Starr."

"But I don't want the thing done in an hospital. I want the operation performed in private."

"Then you have come to the right shop. This is the very house for the job, and I know the man for the work. I know him well. He and I were at Guy's together; Dr. Ernest Blayfield, you know him, by repute anyway. He'll do the trephining for the mere fun of the thing. He's a thorough scientist, you know, and would rather any day lose a whole queue of paying patients than one chance of sporting the auger. He'll let daylight into Mrs. Ellen Starr's noddle, my dear Luxmore, and she will prove everything you want about your Andalusian maid. You shall be married in Hanover Square, with a bishop to tie the knot, and your dear old friend Louis Bertram to see you safe through the ordeal as your best man! Then, my dear fellow, if you don't intend turning your facts into a volume of serious history, large octavo, sixteen shillings, I'll weave them into a charming novel, three volumes, crown octavo, thirty-one and sixpence. But seriously—I have been joking only about the literary aspect of the affair—the operation can be per-

formed here, and Blayfield, whom I know very well, is the man. There will be no opposition on the part of Mrs. Starr?"

"Oh, no. She will do everything she is told. She has absolutely no will of her own."

"Bravo! Then the thing is as good as done."

"And what do you think the result is likely to be, Bertram?"

"Well, you know I never took out my degrees in surgery, and I have only kept up whatever I once knew in a very cursory and slipshod way. I think the restoration of memory may be hoped for; still, seventeen years is a long time. Anyway, the operation can do no harm, and may help you towards your enchanting señorita. And now, my dear fellow, you must get some sleep. This has been a terrible day on a man with shaken nerves, lacerated scalp and fractured femur. This Catmur can do nothing. I'll send off your message to Mr. Greyborne after breakfast. Catmur, being at the wrong side of the law, won't give us any trouble through the police or his solicitor, and if he comes here personally, *I* keep something worse than a ferocious tiger to let loose on him. I have an epic poem,—blank verse epic poem, my boy,—and if he shows his nose here into a room, I will asphyxiate him with that epic—ha-ha! Now, swallow your draught,

and shut your eyes, and I'll sit by you till you're asleep.

Next morning nothing was heard at Palgrave Street of Catmur. Dr. Frazer had lost one patient and obtained another. Luxmore had mysteriously disappeared and Bartholomew Catmur was now in the doctor's hands for treatment of a slight apoplectic seizure. He was to be kept in bed and not allowed to excite himself in any way. The only thing approaching business which he was allowed to attend to was the nomination of a substitute for himself at the show. To an old associate of Catmur's, a man who had just finished a tour in the country as a lecturer with a panorama, the duties of expounder to the Caves were delegated, and, for the first time in its history, that day the greatest show *under* the earth ran its course without the presence of the founder and owner.

Dr. Frazer had warned Catmur against worrying his mind about business. "If you worry yourself about business now," said the doctor, when after hours the showman gradually recovered consciousness, the business may have to get on altogether without you."

But he might as well say to a man, "If you have any desire to prolong your life you must not breathe."

It was not, however, the business of the Caves that occupied Catmur's mind, and robbed him of the peace so essential to his cure. At ordinary times he would have been in a fever about the show, but now the show seemed a matter of slight and distant interest. For years he had looked on the show as a mere stop-gap. It was only a means of supplying bread and cheese while he was on his way to the opulent banquet of Millie's fortune.

How near was he to that fortune now?

Luxmore, that coxcomb, that fop, that maiden-faced apology for a man, had stolen into the secret of Millie's birth and asked him for aid in his designs. And Jeff Monday, whose ugliness was a byword and who had never looked at a woman before, had stolen into the girl's heart and got her promise to be his wife!

Two such blows as these, falling one day after another, were enough to drive a man mad. They had driven him mad when he raised that knife over Luxmore's neck, and when he thrust Luxmore into the menagerie in which the tiger was at large. And now his madness had culminated in a fit, and he was powerless to do anything.

No doubt Luxmore had gone back to Lancaster Gate, but had he taken Ellen there with him? That was the great question. For taking Ellen there

with him would mean that he was going to tell all he knew to Greyborne. Well, he might tell all he knew, but that would not prove anything, and Ellen could not help him in the least, for she never got back her memory for an hour—had never got back her memory for a minute even—since she lost it years ago.

Then a bright thought came into his head:

"Suppose they find out all they wish, what good will it be to them if they can't find the girl?

"If Ellen and Luxmore can disappear mysteriously—the vanishing lady and gentleman—why can't Millie come out in her new and original character as the vanishing heiress? Capital idea!

"But how is it to be managed? Up to last night I had but to order, or rather to ask Millie to do a thing and it was done. How much of my authority does Jeff Monday hold now? Curse Jeff Monday!"

Then all at once he asked himself a question that nearly brought on a second attack.

"What am I going for now? All my thought of marrying Millie is now as much out of the question as of my marrying Queen Anne. What am I going for, then?"

He thought a long time. Then he rang a hand-bell, and in spite of the doctor's strict injunctions that he was to do nothing, wrote a note to Mr. John Greyborne of Lancaster Gate.

CHAPTER XXIV.

JOHN GREYBORNE'S WILL.

Mr. Greyborne was greatly pleased and relieved next morning—Saturday—to get a note from Bertram saying that Mr. Hugh Luxmore had met with a serious accident by which he was disabled, that he had written the evening before last to Lancaster Gate, but that he feared his letter had miscarried, and that he was now lying at Palgrave Street.

Putting on his hat and coat, Mr. Greyborne went at once to Louis Bertram's house.

"I got your note," he said to Luxmore, on entering the invalid's room, "but there was no address on it. Here it is. I am extremely sorry that you are hurt."

"Catmur must have torn off the address," said Luxmore.

Mr. Greyborne took a seat at the foot of the bed, and having again expressed his sorrow and made inquiries as to the progress the patient was making asked, "And how were you so unfortunate as to break your leg?"

Bertram, who had brought the visitor up, said that if anything were wanted the bell would fetch him and left the room.

Luxmore had made up his mind during the night to play a bold game, a desperate game. Up to a certain point it would require the greatest skill. What Bertram had said about the chances of the restoration of memory in Mrs. Starr had diminished Luxmore's faith in the efficacy of the operation. It was more than likely Catmur would at length take action of some kind in the matter. The nature of that action Luxmore could not forecast, but it was sure not to be friendly to the secretary. Luxmore had made up his mind that the present was a position for now or never.

"I have to begin," said the young man humbly, "with a confession."

"A confession!" said the old man with a smile. "You haven't been brawling, Luxmore?"

"No, sir. I have not been brawling. I have been doing what in a man with my means is worse: I have been falling in love."

"Whew! Is that the confession you wish to begin with?" said the contractor encouragingly.

"Yes, sir. That is the confession I have to begin with."

"Well, my dear Luxmore, there is nothing very

unusual or shameful for a young man in that." Greyborne's face shone with a benevolent kindliness Luxmore had never noticed in it before, and this was now a source of reproach to him.

"Perhaps, not, sir, under ordinary circumstances; but there are facts in my case which add seriousness to it."

"Very well. Go on. I am quite easy. I know you too well to fear there is anything disgraceful to you in it."

"You are right, sir. There is nothing disgraceful to me in it, but there is something very embarrassing."

"I am now prepared for a romance," said Greyborne, crossing his legs and looking at the young man encouragingly.

"You shall hear, sir, the most extraordinary romance you ever listened to in all your life. Some months ago I attended, in a suburban hall, the performance in which a clairvoyante took part. She was a girl of most exquisite and spiritual beauty. Her appearance made a profound impression on me. I went again and again to the entertainment, and the oftener I went the greater my admiration grew. I made the most searching inquiries and found out that Miss Mildred Starr—that is the clairvoyante's name—was of irreproachable character—that, in fact,

she had practically never been in the world at all, and lived in the most rigid seclusion with her mother and uncle."

Luxmore did not give the "uncle's" name. "Mildred Starr" was in all likelihood a name Greyborne had never seen. Catmur's, no doubt, he had read on posters, but without making any connection between the name and events of years before. Luxmore did not want Greyborne to anticipate or guess what was coming. An enormous lot would depend on the way in which the story was unfolded; and although he had resolved to tell the old man a good deal, it was necessary to proceed with caution.

He went on:

"Up to this I have not exchanged a word with Miss Starr. I do not ask you to believe me, but it is still quite true that so jealously is this young lady guarded that I have the best reason in the world for believing no man has ever yet said a tender word in her ear or taken her hand in his."

"Is not that very unusual, in people of this calling?" said the old man, merely for the sake of saying something.

"Most unusual. I venture to say it is unique. Well, I sought the acquaintance of the uncle. I was able to bring influence to bear upon him sufficient to overcome his rooted disinclination to strangers.

I told him my story, he promised me his good offices. I told him it was no trifling or evanescent passion. I told him it was a case of life and death with me. I told him I could do him substantial services if he would give me a chance of winning Miss Starr. I told him I would place all, my all, on that one desperate chance, and that if I did not succeed I should——" Luxmore paused with gloomy significance.

"You told him you would own yourself unsuccessful and retire like an honourable man," said Greyborne cheerfully, endeavouring to eliminate the tragic note Luxmore was importing.

"I told him I should blow my brains out."

"Now, now, now! That was wild talk."

"I meant what I said. I do not now know whether I shall want to live. I sent you word I was here. I wish to lay the whole case before you. I wish to put myself without reservation of any kind in your hands. To you and to you alone I confide all; on you and on you alone my fate hangs."

Greyborne looked at his secretary with grave inquietude. "On me and on me alone does your fate hang!" he repeated in a pained, puzzled way. "Are you sure you are considering what you say?"

"I am most closely weighing my words."

"If so, all right. I shall no doubt understand

your meaning when I hear more." Greyborne saw that the young man had cuts and plasters on his head, and thought that perhaps the brain had been injured.

"I had every reason to think matters would go on well, when, going incautiously into a menagerie attached to the show, I was attacked by a ferocious tiger and escaped with my life and a broken leg. I should have been a dead man only that an attendant shot the tiger."

"Attacked by a tiger! Good gracious! what a horrible thing! Where was this dangerous show?"

"At the other side of the Thames. Would you oblige me by giving me a drink of water?" he said. His excitement was intense. His hand shook as he took the glass from the old man. He was on the point of putting his great stake on the cast. He had a choking, suffocating sensation.

While he drank the water he was to tell the old man that the supposititious uncle of the girl informed him she was enormously wealthy, that there was a secret about her birth, or rather that when an infant she was supposed to have died, that the supposititious uncle had kept the secret of her birth to himself and now offered it to him for ten thousand pounds, that suddenly it flashed into his mind that this man was the brother of Mr. Greyborne's nurse,

and that, judged by the extraordinary likeness between the beautiful clairvoyante and the portrait of Mrs. Greyborne, there could not be the shadow of doubt the Millie Starr of to-day was the grown-up and renamed Inez Greyborne of seventeen years ago.

When he had reached this point he should affect to be overwhelmed with agony at the thought of losing the girl he loved because of the enormous disparity between her fortune and his own. Then, if his strength lasted, he should make a wild appeal to Greyborne to give him as a wife the girl he restored to the old man as a daughter. He could not persuade himself that his chance was good, but his case was desperate, with Catmur threatening him and in possession of the whole story, of which he only guessed a part, and above all, in possession of the girl herself, with the power of leading her by the hand at any moment into the presence of the father.

He felt far from strong, far from equal to the task before him. Perhaps the plan was idiotically unlikely to succeed, but he could think of no other now, and there was no time to invent another. At all risks he must try to get the father on his side.

It was, of course, a monstrous thing for him, a secretary with a couple of hundred a year, to ask a man of Greyborne's enormous wealth for his daugh-

ter, but then he was first of all going to give back to the old man a daughter, the only living being of his blood, whose death he had mourned for years and years.

"And now," said he, speaking in a low voice and with a cruel sense of failing strength, "comes one of the wonderful parts of the romance. While I was lying hurt the reputed uncle of the girl told me, no doubt by way of cheering me, that Miss Starr was not really his niece at all, but a child he had adopted long ago, and that he had just found out she was heiress to an enormous fortune."

"How delightful!" said Mr. Greyborne, resolved to take a cheerful view of the case whenever there was any excuse for doing so. "What could be more romantic, more just, than that the young lady you loved when poor should all at once turn out to be rich?"

"But she is not *rich*. She has colossal, prodigious wealth."

"All the better. All the more just. Surely you do not object to her on that score?"

"No; but her guardian must object to me, a pauper, a poor penniless fellow with not a farthing——"

"Stop," said Mr. Greyborne suddenly and authoritatively. He rose from his chair and took a few turns up and down the room excitedly. Luxmore

had never seen him so agitated before. The old man swayed his arms to and fro as he walked, and at last stood at the foot of the bed, and looking at the patient, said with decision, "I'll tell him."

Luxmore stared at the other in amazement. He was about to hear some astounding news. What? He scarcely breathed.

"When we were speaking the other evening after dinner at Lancaster Gate," said the old man, "I told you you might make your mind easy about the future—— No, do not say anything. I must speak now; you may as well know now as when I am dead —better, a thousand times better. I have now known you, Luxmore, for more than a year. I have met you every day. You have sat at my table, and I have watched you much more closely than you supposed."

The prostrate man felt growing faint. What terrible blow was going to be struck? What awful revelation was going to be made?

"During all that time I have never seen you do, never heard you say, one thing which did not redound to the credit of your heart. You are an honourable gentleman, Luxmore. I have grown to love you as my own son." Greyborne paused.

The secretary gasped, but could not, did not try to utter a word.

"I have no one in the world belonging to me, not

a soul. I like you better than any man I have ever met, young or old, rich or poor, for you are the soul of honour, and have a delicacy of feeling I never met in any man before. In my will I have left fifty thousand pounds to D'Alligham, a hundred thousand in charities, and the rest to you."

With a shriek Luxmore sat up in the bed. "What? to me?"

"Yes, nearly nine hundred thousand to you."

"Great heavens!" cried Luxmore, "and that without plotting or lying or treason. Be merciful to me! I am punished beyond my strength," and with a moan he fell back.

He had fainted.

CHAPTER XXV.

MR. CATMUR'S DECLARATION.

Mr. Greyborne started back from the foot of the bed, shocked by the cry, the strange words and the collapse of his secretary. For an instant he thought Luxmore must be dead. Then suddenly regaining presence of mind, he rang the bell.

In a moment Bertram was in the room. "Ah!" he cried. "Fainted. Over-excitement. He should not have been allowed to excite himself at all. Please, don't hold the head up. I'll have him round in a jiffy. It might be as well for him if he does not see you here when he comes to. Will you be so kind as to wait for me downstairs? I'll be with you in a few minutes. There is no occasion for alarm. I'm not quite a doctor, but I know enough, Mr. Greyborne, to assure you there is no immediate danger; still, we must have no more excitement."

When Bertram came downstairs from the sick-room he said that Luxmore had recovered consciousness, but was extremely weak in body, and seemed

to be a little weakened in mind too, as he was vapouring about the wages of treason being his, as if he had committed some first-class transpontine melodramatic crime and was chewing the cud of memory.

Mr. Greyborne took his leave, promising to call in the evening for news of Luxmore's condition.

He went away depressed and astonished. What had caused Luxmore to shriek when informed of his generous intention? What had caused the injured man to cry out against himself? Why had he spoken of plotting, of lying, of treason? These words had odious meanings, and seemed to have been forced from Luxmore's lips by the notification that the secretary was to be his heir. Could it be that this young man had invented the story just told, or, anyway, harped upon the subject of his own poverty in order to force the hand of him, Greyborne? It seemed ungenerous and unjust to harbour such a suspicion. Yet it was the only explanation he could possibly supply of the words wrung from Luxmore on hearing the news which ought to have been received with joy, except, indeed, the young man's mind had been affected by his accident and he was suffering from some distressing delusion.

That morning in his haste he had come away from home without opening his letters. He would go back and look at them before going to the club.

When he returned to Lancaster Gate he found among his letters the following, marked "Strictly private, for Mr. Greyborne's eyes only":

"THE FARM, CLAYTON FLAT,
"CLAYTON JUNCTION, *Saturday Morning.*

"DEAR SIR:

"*The moment you get this come here.* I have information *of the most vital importance* to give you. I would go to you only I am laid up with illness. What I have to tell you is of a *strictly private* and confidential character. You will find this house in the middle of Clayton Flat. You may know my name from posters throughout London.

"I am, dear Sir,
"Your sincere well-wisher and friend,
"BARTHOLOMEW CATMUR."

"Two summonses to sick men in one day," said Greyborne to himself, as he turned once more away from his own door. "This is not a mere coincidence. Of course I know Catmur's name. 'Catmur's Caves, the greatest show *under* the earth. Clayton Junction.' This is the place where poor Luxmore saw the beautiful girl. Poor fellow, he had not strength to tell me all. Well, if it will improve his position in the eyes of this young girl's people, I'll indicate

to them that one day Hugh Luxmore will have a fortune large enough to make him, in a worldly sense, the equal of any heiress in London.

"Catmur! Catmur! It is not a very common name. It ought anyway to be familiar for ever to me. That was the name of Ellen Taylor's brother. I wonder can this man be anything to Ellen Taylor? Most likely he is. Perhaps it is the very same man. Now I remember that brother of Ellen Taylor's was an acrobat or conjuror or showman of some kind. Of course it must be the same man. Bartholomew! That was, now that I recall it, the Christian name of Ellen Taylor's brother. Nothing could be more unlikely than that there are two Bartholomew Catmurs, unless they are father and son. I thought it a strange coincidence that I should be summoned to two bedsides the one day. Perhaps, after all, there may be no coincidence: the two cases may have some more reasonable connection than the mere accident of occurring at the one time."

Catmur had told Millie that he expected a visitor, that she was to keep herself in readiness to come up to his room when he sent for her, but that she was not to show herself until Susan come with word her uncle wanted her.

When Mr. Greyborne arrived he was at once shown up to the room where Catmur lay.

As soon as the old man was seated Catmur plunged into the heart of business at once. He knew he was not subtle, and that if he tried to be clever he might only blunder. He began:

"Mr. Greyborne, I will not ask you whether you have heard anything more of this affair than Mr. Luxmore's note told you, or whether you know everything Mr. Luxmore knows. I shall go on straight, merely saying two things first—namely, that I know I may trust to your generosity in the matter of reward, and that, however anybody else may have behaved in this matter, Mr. Hugh Luxmore has behaved to you, sir, as a traitor."

"Traitor! Traitor! How traitor?" said Greyborne, surprised and disturbed at finding this same word in this other man's mouth also.

"Well," said Catmur, "you will be able to find plenty of justification for the word in what I have to say. A few days ago Mr. Hugh Luxmore called upon me and asked me if I would take twenty thousand pounds to aid him in marrying Miss Starr, a young lady who has most of her life passed as my niece."

"Twenty thousand pounds! That is a large sum of money."

"Yes, but this Mr. Hugh Luxmore wanted good value for his money. I see by that remark you

know no more about the affair than Hugh Luxmore's note told you."

Mr. Greyborne thought, on the contrary, that he knew everything about the affair, but held his peace.

"Well," Catmur went on, "what Luxmore said in connection with Miss Starr set me thinking and looking about the house, and in the end, after searching among my dead wife's papers, I came upon a document which shows as plainly as daylight Mr. Hugh Luxmore was a shameful traitor to you."

"To me!"

"To you. Now, Mr. Greyborne, I place myself entirely in your hands. You will, I know, deal fairly by me. I am going to place in your hands a document for which Mr. Hugh Luxmore would have given me twenty, thirty, forty thousand pounds. I make no terms with you. When you have finished the document you will know why I sent for you in such hot haste, and you will, as an honourable gentleman, say what you think I am fairly and squarely entitled to. I need only say before you begin to read that the child mentioned as having lived is now known as Miss Starr, the young lady for whose hand Mr. Hugh Luxmore offered me forty thousand pounds when he found out from another source the story in

this paper. This paper itself he has never laid eyes upon."

Catmur handed the old man a folded sheet of blue ruled foolscap as he spoke.

The contractor took it, and going over to the window, stood with his back to the light.

"You had better sit down," said Catmur, watching Greyborne closely. "It will take some time to read, and even yet you are not prepared for the surprise it will cause you.

Greyborne followed Catmur's advice, took a chair by the small dressing-table in the window and began the document. He read on steadily to the end, never once taking his eyes off the paper. When he finished he looked at Catmur, lying silent and watchful, on the bed. He put the declaration down beside him on the table, and said in a low, firm voice:

"Mr. Catmur, you say this matter, this astonishing matter, has only come to your knowledge lately?"

"Within the present week. When Luxmore came to me first I had no more knowledge of it than you had then," said Catmur, lying glibly. "Luxmore told me he had found it out or guessed it from some papers he found in helping you with your 'Life.'"

"Then Luxmore, instead of being an honourable man, is a low, mercenary villain."

"Honourable man! Why, he is the lowest kind of

all scoundrels—a traitor. He lived under your roof, he broke your bread, he took your money, and he wanted to repay all your kindness by buying your daughter from me with your money, marry the girl, and then pretend he found out only then, when she was fast bound to him, that she was the daughter of one of the richest men in England."

"It was infamous perfidy. And this very day—this very morning—I told him I had made him my heir."

"You don't want any stranger for an heir now. You have your own flesh and blood to inherit your money."

"Ay, if I were sure," said the man, in a dreamy voice. "But how can I be sure? How can I know for certain? You must not think for a moment I doubt you, Mr. Catmur, but to-day, since I came into this room, I have discovered the man I trusted most in the world is a corrupt, heartless, traitorous villain."

The old man was lost in reverie.

"What would convince you?"

"I do not think anything would convince me just now. I do not feel as if I should be able to believe in any one again."

"You would not like to see Miss Starr, as she is called?"

The old man roused up suddenly, as if awaking from a painful sleep. "Is she here? I did not know she was here. If what your dead wife said is true she must have some look of my dead wife, my poor lost Claudia."

"But," said Catmur, stretching out his hand and touching the bell, "I thought her name was Inez?"

"The name of the child was Inez, but my wife ——Merciful Heavens, what is this? Am I dead already, that I see the dead?"

The tall, slender figure of Millie was in the doorway.

"That's Miss Starr," said Catmur.

"It is my wife again!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE LAST.

"Does this gentleman bring news of my mother?" said the girl, looking from Greyborne to Catmur.

The old man drew back a pace and then stepped forward a pace towards the figure in the doorway. "It is her voice, my Claudia's voice again!" he whispered in a rapt tones. He went to her and took her hand. "My child, my child! come to the light, let me look at you. Let me hear your voice again."

"Do you bring any news of my mother? We are, oh, so anxious about her," said the girl pleadingly, as she moved across the room to the window, led by him.

"You need not be uneasy about your mother, my child. I bring you news of her. You have her eyes, her hair, her hands," he murmured softly in the same tone of reverie, as he meditated over her features.

"Then she is safe, sir? You know she is safe?"

"Yes, dear, safe."

"Oh, thank you, sir; thank you. We were pitifully uneasy. We feared an accident to her in the street, she is so simple. Will she soon be with us here again? Where is she now?"

"Millie," said Catmur from the bed, as the girl sat down, "we have made the most wonderful discovery. You know how Ellen always said her child had a weak ankle?"

"Yes, but my ankle grew strong after my mother's memory grew weak."

"Your ankle was never weak. Your ankle was always straight. She was right and we were wrong. We have only just found out her mother's heart was not deceived."

"What does he mean, sir? Do you know what my uncle means, sir?" she said, turning her eyes, in surprise, from the bed to the old man standing over her.

"You are Ellen's child, but only her foster child."

"Only my mother's foster child! I do not understand."

"Well, you are only Ellen's child by adoption, and my niece by adoption, as I may say; though I did not know of it until this week. Do you remember my telling you the night before last, just as Susan ran to us across the Flat, that one day you would be enormously rich?"

"Yes, but that would not make me less—that would only make me more her child than ever."

"I know it would make you more than ever her child in love and duty. But we now know for certain she was right about her own baby's foot, and all of us were wrong. Her baby's foot was weak, turned in. Her child could never stand upright on that foot——"

"But the child outgrew the weakness."

"No, the child did not. Her child died. It was her child that was killed in the accident years ago. Your own mother died even before that, when you were an infant just born. You are not Ellen's child, but Mrs. Greyborne's, the wife of the rich Mr. Greyborne. You have no mother living, Millie, and that is your father standing over you there."

The girl rose to her feet and stepped back from the old man. "Oh, no, sir; you must not be my father if my mother must be dead! I have loved my sweet, simple mother all my life, and I do not know you, sir. Tell me, sir, my uncle is wrong. Oh, tell me he is wrong, and take me—in pity take me to my poor darling! I do not know you. I never saw you before. But I have loved her all my life with all my heart, and I want to go to her, to feel my arms round her once again."

"Child!" said the old man, "what he has said is all strange past belief, both for you and for me, but it is all true. It is hard for you to bear now, my child, for you must lose as a mother her you have always loved for a mother; and it is hard for me to bear now, child, for it brings back to me the memory of what I lost years ago. A mother you knew is taken from you, my child, and you feel the loss. A father you do not know is given to you and you feel no gain. I see in you, dearest, your mother, the wife who was inexpressibly dear to me, whom I lost; and never having known you, whom I get back, I feel only pain. But I get a daughter, and in Heaven's good time we shall be reconciled to fate."

"But I shall always love her."

"Yes, dearest, always love where you have once loved. I began to love late in life. Love all you can, your adopted mother, and in time you will love me, for you are my child and it is my duty to win your love."

"And you will want it?"

"Above all things, dearest."

"And you will take it from me as I am, as I have it to give, as you find me able to give it?"

"What you give me, child, will be all gain to me, and I shall be grateful for it."

"You will take me as I am now? you will not ask me to go back?"

"I will not ask you to go back, to take away what you have given to her, your adopted mother. Already, child, I begin to feel a calm I have never known for years. Already, I feel the peace that ought to fill the days of old age. When I go to where your mother is, dearest, I shall tell her I saw you, her little child, grown up with all the beauty of her form, and all the spirit of her beauty in her eyes and voice."

"But there is not only the mother I love."

"There are others. There is your uncle."

"Yes, I love him too, and another."

"No" cried the old man aghast, "not Luxmore?"

"No," said Catmur, "she never spoke to him. Is it Jeff, Millie? He told me you and he had spoken."

"Yes, Jeff Monday. He is lonelier than I. He shot the tiger, the only thing he loved, the only thing that loved him—he shot the tiger to save Mr. Luxmore's life."

"But Mr. Luxmore wanted to marry you because he found out you were my daughter and would be rich."

"I did not know that."

The old man turned towards Catmur. "I will ask only one question: is this man Jeff honourable towards women and men?"

"Honourable!" said she, with a scorn of such a question being asked about him. "Honourable among women and men! Why, sir, he is honourable among the beasts, and he, the tiger, loved him."

"And he shot the tiger he loved to save his rival's life?"

"Oh, he had no rival! He did not think of me then. He told me he shot the tiger to save a human life."

Catmur turned uneasily on the bed. How much more would Jeff tell? His own game was up. He had lost what he had been playing for. Jeff Monday held a terrible secret against him. This girl would cleave to Jeff, though all the world were opposed to him. So far the old man showed no objection to Jeff. He, Bartholomew Catmur, had better be on the winning side. He said aloud:

"For Jeff Monday being an honest and honourable man, I'll answer with my life."

"I ask no more," said the old man, holding out his hand to the girl.

She caught the hand and sank upon her knees

and kissed his hand. Looking up she said, "I give you my duty, sir, my father. And by-and-by my love will come."

He raised her, and, overwhelmed with emotion kissed her on the brow.

"May I tell him, and ask him to come up? He is below," she said.

"Yes."

In a few minutes the girl returned, followed by the man.

"Sir, this is Jeff. I have told him all."

The old man bowed, and said: "This lady tells me she had given you her heart before she knew she had a father. May I, sir, offer you her father's hand?"

"She tells me you are rich," said Jeff, "but I did not hope to get to-day all I value of yours beyond herself." He took the old man's hand and smiled, that smile which made men draw back ashamed before the beauty of its spirit.

"When I saw her first," said the old man, putting his hand on the girl's shoulder, "I seemed to see her mother over again. Her mother used to sing to me. When I saw you now I seemed to hear her mother singing over again."

"I heard no song," said Jeff.

"I am old, and I suppose fanciful. I suppose your

face gave me the content of heart I found in the music."

"Then," said Jeff, "you must have heard my heart."

"Or mine," said the girl.

"Or perhaps I am so old, so near the Golden Gates that I heard the voice of the mother blessing you from within."

THE END.

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